

THE HERESY TRIAL

IS STILL BEHIND CLOSED DOORS.

Members of the Committee
Counsel for Both Sides

Refuse to Talk—The Bishop's
Order Not Allowing

Newspaper Men in the Trial Is
Being Obeyed to the Letter
and They Wait Outside.

A Pretty Good Report
of the Proceedings
Was Secured.

What promises to be the greatest trial of the century in church circles is going on in Arkansas City. Granville Lowther, the Methodist minister from McPherson, a man of undoubted ability, whose standing in the world of deep thinkers, is firm, is charged with being a heretic and a committee from the Southwest Kansas conference is hearing the charges brought against him.

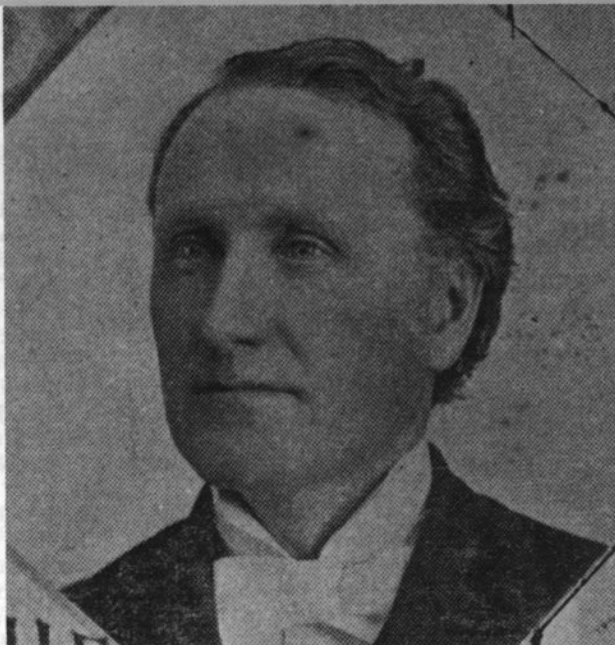
Granville Lowther was born in West Virginia and at the age of 17 years moved west to Illinois. There he entered the ministry of the Methodist church and for a number of years was an active elder in that state. Twenty-seven years ago he moved to Kansas and became a member of the Southwest Kansas conference, where he holds his membership at the present time.

He is a progressive man given to deep Bible study and has

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GRANVILLE LOWTHER —HERETIC OR HERALD

INA TURNER GRAY and PHILLIP E. CHASTAIN

I. INTRODUCTION

ONE OF THE most sensational aspects of Protestantism has been heresy trials. Generally Methodists were content to let the Presbyterians and other denominations occupy the limelight in this area. Although Methodists sometimes boasted that they had no heresy trials, it was possible to be tried and expelled for disseminating ideas contrary to doctrinal standards.¹ In fact the famed Methodist layman, Borden Parker Bowne, who is reported to have "reached the minds of more Christians than any other philosopher of religion in the United States,"² was tried for heresy and ac-

quitted by the New York East Conference.³ In 1905 the Central New York Conference refused to grant a trial to his colleague, Prof. H. G. Mitchell, because of the disturbance it would cause. Nevertheless, they censured him.⁴ These events, as well as the single heresy trial in the Southwest Kansas Conference, may be seen as exceptions to the rule. In Kansas, as in New York, the conference chose one of its most eminent members, Granville Lowther, toward whom to point the finger of suspicion.

II. THE MAN

IN 1886 Granville Lowther received a call to serve the Methodist Episcopal church in Dodge City. "This call was largely if not entirely due to a snow storm. Neither the pastor nor the parishioners could ever question the divineness of that call."⁵

Title-page photos: Granville Lowther (1848-1933), McPherson minister, was tried and convicted of heresy by the Southwest Kansas Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church in 1902 at Arkansas City for his evolutionary interpretations of scripture. Although the trial was held in secret session, area newspapers carried full accounts as in the above example from the *Arkansas City Daily Traveler*, March 28, 1902. Lowther was a leader in the conference and at one time president of Southwestern College at Winfield.

1. Nolan B. Harmon, "Heresy," *Encyclopedia of World Methodism* (Nashville, United Methodist Publishing House, 1974).

2. Charles W. Ferguson, *Organizing to Beat the Devil* (Garden City, N. Y., Doubleday, 1971), p. 424.

3. *Dictionary of American Biography*, ed. Allen Johnson, II (New York, Charles Scribner's Sons, 1929), p. 523.

4. Stephen G. Cobb, "Mitchell, Hinkley Gilbert," *Encyclopedia of World Methodism*.

5. Charles C. Lowther, *Panhandle Parson* (Nashville, Parthenon Press, 1942), p. 14.

It happened this way: Lowther had gone west to look for a location where he might regain his health. He favored Kansas because it had been abolitionist from the beginning and because of the prohibition law upon its statute books. And so he found himself unexpectedly snowbound in a railroad car in Dodge City. When a church committee needed a preacher to supply the church on Sunday, Lowther was so glad for a chance to get really warm that he forgot his ills and went bounding up the street in the storm.⁶ For the next 16 years he was a very active member of the Southwest Kansas Conference.

Not only did he serve as president of the Freedman's Aid and temperance societies and as a trustee of Southwest Kansas College, Winfield, Baker University, Baldwin, and Dodge School of Theology, Dodge City, but he was a member, secretary, or chairman of at least 11 important committees. He was the pastor at Dodge City, 1887-1888; Larned, 1889-1890; Wellington, 1891; Newton, 1892-1893; McPherson, 1900-1901; and presiding elder of the Winfield district for six years.⁷ In addition, this largely self-educated scholar, who somehow carried a B. D. after his name, taught history and English at the College of Western Kansas in Dodge City,⁸ taught mental and moral philosophy at Southwest Kansas College (the former name of Southwestern College),⁹ and was vice-president and acting president of the school. This was hardly the schedule for a sick man.

The conference journal records that Lowther transferred from the Iowa or Upper Iowa Conference¹⁰ but Lowther's own biographical sketch says he came from Tuscola, Ill., to Dodge City.¹¹ Granville had been born in Doddridge county, Virginia (later West Virginia), on January 19, 1848, the son of Jesse and Hannah Leeson Lowther.¹² When he was 17 he moved with his parents to the eastern

edge of central Illinois where he lived on a farm. In 1874 he began to serve nearby churches including Chrisman and Pilot. By 1882 he had become a Methodist minister and was appointed to Potomac. From 1883 to 1885 he was at Tuscola.¹³

He married Elizabeth Anne Boyce on December 22, 1869.¹⁴ She died on February 7, 1889, leaving five children: Ada May (Mrs. H. S. Wilkinson), John Franklin, Charles C., Lola E. (Mrs. Jesse Clyde Fisher), and Mabel Elizabeth (Mrs. W. T. Schwarz). His second marriage was at Great Bend, on July 9, 1890. The bride was Linna May, daughter of the superintendent of schools, William Reece.¹⁵

In 1891 Lowther became a member of the board of trustees of the Southwest Kansas College and for the next 10 years he gave a great deal of his attention to that institution. In 1894 he became vice-president of the board and from 1896 to 1900 he was chairman. Also, in 1894 he became a member of the executive committee of the board and served as its president from June 21 that year until December 17, 1895. In the fall of 1898 he again took over the leadership of that committee to which he belonged from 1894 to 1899.¹⁶

According to the May 21, 1895, minutes of the executive committee: "The Bd. decided to lease the school to G. Lowther, C. A. Place, C. E. Lowe, V. V. Price, Prof. Franklin, and Prof. Dunlevy for the succeeding college year on practically the same conditions as last year, specifying that Lessees shall be bound for the full year unless released by the Bd. of Trustees." The board of trustees minutes for July 23, 1895, simply read: "The Bd. decided to lease the institution to C. A. Place and G. Lowther." Thus Lowther assumed coownership of the college for a year.

On December 14, 1894, the Winfield *Daily Courier* announced: "Rev. Lowther has been elected to occupy the position of president of the college after this term." Lowther stated it this way:

13. Illinois conference journals.

14. The 1889 Southwest Kansas Conference "Journal" gives the date as 1879 which cannot be correct as the third child, Charles, was 10 in 1886.—See Charles C. Lowther, *Dodge City, Kansas* (Philadelphia, Dorrance and Company, Publishers, 1940), p. 19. Could this be another instance of the failure of the "brethren" to get things straight about G. Lowther and an omen of things to come?

15. *The National Cyclopaedia of American Biography*, v. 28, p. 418.

16. From minutes of the board of trustees and the executive committee.

6. *Ibid.*, p. 16.

7. Southwest Kansas Conference "Journals," 1886-1901. The "Journals" were included in annual volumes of conference reports called, in the later years, *Minutes*.

8. Sister Mary Cleophas Kelly, "A History of Soule College of Dodge City, Kansas 1887-1910, as an Example of Frontier Higher Education" (unpublished dissertation, 1962), p. 35.

9. *Catalogs*, 1895, 1896.

10. Southwest Kansas Conference "Journal," 1886, pp. 56, 59.

11. Unless otherwise annotated, biographical information comes from this sketch which is in possession of the Commission on Archives and History, Southwestern College, Winfield.

12. *The National Cyclopaedia of American Biography* (New York, James T. White & Co., 1940), v. 28, p. 418.

During my term of Presiding Elder, the Southwest Kansas College, Winfield, was in severe financial straits, on account of the panic of 1893. President M. E. Philips resigned and Professor Rice took his place. Then Professor Rice resigned and I took his place, acting president, collecting moneys and teaching a class in Psychology free of charge, at the same time doing the work of the District as P. E., from which I drew my salary.

The new job seemed to call out the very best in the man. It was a sufficient challenge for his considerable abilities. The December, 1894, *Southwestern Collegian* was enthusiastic: "Presiding Elder Lowther makes a very popular instructor. Indeed Bro. Lowther is an 'all-round man': preacher, revivalist, editor and teacher." Again in January, 1895, the *Collegian* editorialized: "In . . . President Lowther's speech, we find the key to his peculiar fitness for the place; the fact that he knows so well and is so well known throughout the conference, renders him the most fitting person, to stand between the homes and the school of the conference." At the reception for the new members of the faculty, "Pres. Lowther's response was characteristic of the man; elegant, instinct with faith, the very embodiment of purpose." The February *Collegian* covered "The Faculty Lectures"; "A short account was given in the last issue of Pres. Lowther's able discourse upon a psycho-religious subject. . . . President Lowther can handle such topics with perfect ease showing a depth of thought and study not to be surpassed."

As president of the college (spring term 1895) Lowther held high ideals for the school. He wrote: "The Christian college, is one in which persons are converted, as well as instructed; one in which the building up of a religious character is considered of more importance than the latest social hop." ¹⁷ In February the *Collegian* printed a pious and orthodox article entitled "College Spirit" and signed G. L.:

On the day of prayer, when the President asked those who would pray for the success of the institution, and make the college the subject of daily prayer to arise, nearly the whole body of students arose. . . . A large majority of the students are Christians and bear on their hearts the feeling that they must get the unconverted saved, before the school year shall close.

Years later, in 1911, the *Courier* summed up

17. "Why Do We Need a College in Southwest Kansas?," *Southwestern Collegian*, January, 1895.

the contribution Granville Lowther made to the college:

During those dark days, Granville Lowther, Presiding Elder of this District and Chairman of the Board of Trustees "without the hope of fee or reward," exercised the duties of president and gathered about him a faithful faculty of scholarly and devoted men and women who worked, not for themselves, but solely for the salvation of the institution. . . . Thus this institution was forever saved to Methodism and this salvation was made possible by W. C. Robinson, Mr. Hinshaw, Granville Lowther and Rev. W. H. Rose.¹⁸

Here is a man at the peak of achievement. As the *Courier* stated on March 29, 1902, he was a "man of undoubted ability." He was popular with his peers for in 1896 they elected him on the first ballot as one of three delegates to represent them at the General Conference in Cleveland.¹⁹ Then, as now, election as a delegate proclaimed top ranking among conference members. The bishop showed his confidence in Lowther by appointing him, not only to large and important churches, but also to the presiding eldership. Baker University had seen fit to confer upon Lowther the honorary doctorate in 1899.²⁰ The *Topeka Journal* called him "one of the best read men in Kansas." Dr. Lowther has left for us samples of his lucid writing. He was editor of the *Southwestern Advocate*, an unofficial publication of the Southwest Kansas Conference. He was also in demand as a speaker. For instance, it is a matter of record in the journals that he gave major addresses for groups meeting during the 1891 and 1892 conference sessions. The faculty had elected him president of the college ²¹ and the trustees had chosen him for numerous positions of leadership. For 10 years he was a trustee of the Winfield Chautauqua Assembly and for many years president of the Kansas State Holiness Association.²² Indeed, a writer from the *Central Christian Advocate* declared that he "never heard one word of Dr. Lowther except of tenderness and respect, founded on his talents, his character, his usefulness and his consecration."²³

It was against this outstanding man that

18. "To Have New President," *Winfield Daily Courier*, June 23, 1911.

19. Southwest Kansas Conference "Journal," 1896, p. 193.

20. *Who Was Who in America* (Chicago, A. N. Marquis Co., 1942), v. 1, p. 751. Lowther was listed in *Who's Who in America* from 1922-1934.

21. *Western Methodist*, Wichita, March 26, 1896.

22. *Arkansas City Daily Traveler*, March 22, 1902.

23. *McPherson Daily Republican*, April 5, 1902.

eight of his fellows leveled the charge of heresy. Lowther believed in "evolution as a philosophy" and preached it from his pulpit, but he did not expect to be declared a heretic. He was convicted and "of course he was crushed."²⁴ More than half a century later his daughter wrote: "My father's teaching and preaching is exactly what is being taught in the churches now. Father was 40 years ahead of his time in thought. He was far more brilliant than his contemporaries who sat in judgment on him."²⁵ When Dr. A. E. Kirk, a subsequent president of Southwestern College, wanted to write the story of Dr. Lowther's life, his sons objected seriously. "That affair cut so deep that none of us ever wanted it mentioned. They feared their younger generation would not understand."²⁶

Lowther was able "to rise above the injury."²⁷ After the trial, he "took the lecture platform" in Kansas, Missouri, and Oklahoma and "organized a People's Church at Wichita" where he published a paper *Social Ethics*. In 1906 he moved to Yakima, Wash., and bought a small fruit farm. There also he edited a four-volume *Encyclopedia of Horticulture* and a magazine *Fancy Fruit*. A book of his poems was published in 1922. He entered the ministry of the Congregational Church in 1915.²⁸ At the community Christmas Eve service in 1924 he was honored as a highly respected citizen.²⁹ He died in Seattle, on September 9, 1933.³⁰

III. THE TRIAL

FOLLOWING his term as presiding elder of the Winfield district in 1900, Granville Lowther was appointed to the pastorate of the Methodist Episcopal church in McPherson.³¹ During this period, as a result of his extensive reading of German and French philosophers, i.e., Hegel, Kant, Fichte, Spencer, and out of his own thinking, he developed an evolutionary interpretation of the atonement of Christ. Lowther presented his unorthodox views in a

paper called "Atonement," which he read at the McPherson District Conference held at Frederick, on February 26, 1902.³²

A month later on March 26, the Southwest Annual Methodist Episcopal Conference to which Lowther belonged convened at Arkansas City.³³ On the second day of the conference, following the examination of the character of the ministers, the presiding bishop, W. F. Mallalieu, announced that charges against Lowther, signed by eight members of the conference, had been placed in his hands. The three specific charges stated that certain interpretations in the "Atonement" paper were not in harmony with the larger catechism of the Methodist Episcopal Church.

The first charge involved the interpretation of the conversation the serpent had with Eve in Genesis 3. It identified the "serpent as a man, one who had not yet come into the consciousness of God, and was classified with the beasts."

Specification number two stated that "Adam and Eve, at the time of creation had no moral perception of their obligation to obedience, that in eating of the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil they had a higher vision of spiritual things than formerly and consequently felt guilty."

The third specification dealt with the interpretation of Christ's death upon the cross. Lowther stated that "Christ died for man to show man how to die for man."³⁴ According to those bringing the charges against Lowther, this interpretation differed from and was considered "subversive of the doctrines of Atonement set forth in the Articles of Religion III and IX as set forth in the large catechism, which says He (Christ) suffered and died to save us from eternal death and to purchase for us peace with God, righteousness and eternal life."³⁵

The official 1902 conference journal contains no specific details of the trial because Bishop Mallalieu called for it to be conducted in secret session with only the results to be given to the conference. He said "it would be well to give not one single word to the press in any way."³⁶

24. Letter from Lola Lowther Fisher to Grace Hayes Jones, February 19, 1954. It was this letter which aroused my interest in Granville Lowther.

25. *Ibid.*

26. *Ibid.*

27. Letter from Lola Lowther Fisher to Rev. Phillip E. Chastain, August 16, 1957.

28. *The National Cyclopaedia of American Biography*, v. 28, p. 418.

29. Yakima (Wash.) *Republic*, December 20, 1924.

30. *Who Was Who in America* (1942), v. 1, p. 751.

31. Southwest Kansas Conference "Journal," 1900.

32. *Wichita Daily Eagle*, March 27, 1902, Lowther's "Atonement," pp. 17, 19-21, 42.

33. Southwest Kansas Conference "Journal," 1902.

34. *Wichita Daily Eagle*, March 27, 1902. Also "Atonement."

35. M. E. *Discipline*, 1900.

36. *Winfield Courier*, April 3, 1902.

But his words went unheeded and area newspapers carried full accounts of the trial proceedings. Using accounts from the press and material from the 1902 S. W. Kansas Methodist Episcopal "Journal," we want to reconstruct the story of the trial in chronological order.

The account of the trial proceedings in the *Wichita Eagle*, March 27, 1902, told of the formal presentation of the charges against Lowther. Although arraigned on charges of teaching doctrines contrary to the creed of the M. E. Church, the word "heresy" was not used.

The first bill of charges was not considered because it was not signed; however, the second one, which contained signatures of eight conference ministers, was accepted. The charges were not read to the conference because the bishop said "he presumed that they were familiar to all present."³⁷ They were "entertained by the conference, and D. D. Akin, from Marion, upon motion, was appointed to act as counsel for the church. He named T. W. Jeffery, Winfield, as assistant counsel."³⁸ Named as counsel for Lowther were Charles G. Wood from the Illinois Conference and W. H. Rose of Winfield.³⁹

To bring the Lowther case to trial, it was necessary to follow one of the guidelines of the 1900 edition of the M.E. Church *Discipline*, using a "Select Number" to hear the evidence and render a verdict. "Twenty names had been selected by the elders (presumably conference officers) and the bishop, and Rev. Lowther passed on thirteen of them."⁴⁰

A "select number" of 11 were appointed as follows: W. Reace, Meade; F. C. Fay, Garden City; W. A. Van Gundy, Wellington; H. J. Ducker, Winfield; W. L. Dexter, Caldwell; J. L. Patterson, Stafford; I. A. Bartholomew, Walton; Stephen Brink, Cheney; J. N. Roberts, Mt. Hope; I. N. Pierce, Garfield. C. F. Howes, Newton, was chosen as the chairman of the "select number" to act as trial judge. L. M. Riley, as assistant secretary of the conference, served as "select number" secretary.⁴¹

Four members of the "select number" entered the ministry through the S. W. Kansas

Conference, and the remainder had transferred into the conference. Several held smaller churches and were among the younger and newer members of the conference. The selection of this group made up of younger and less experienced men may have influenced the outcome of the case in a manner which Lowther had not expected. Although younger, they were not necessarily more liberal in their theological views or more sympathetic to Lowther's position.⁴²

Lowther's trial began Thursday, March 26, 1902, in the Arkansas City Christian church.⁴³ The defense moved to have "the case dismissed upon the technical point that Dr. Lowther had never been served with the charges until Wednesday evening (March 25) at 6 o'clock."⁴⁴ The motion intended to show that the defendant did not have sufficient time to prepare his defense. It stated, however, that Lowther had seen a copy of the charges "about ten days ago." This was a reference to the "unsigned" bill of charges.⁴⁵

The defense counsel then stated that a third bill of charges was presented which differed from the other two. But after some discussion it was decided that the charges were substantially the same. The main point of difference between the second and the last was the reference to the place where the heretical statements were made. The papers were amended to read "that the sentiments were uttered (by Lowther) at Frederick, Kansas, on February 26, 1902."⁴⁶ Chairman Howes stated that the defendant "had plenty of time to prepare his defense and the trial proceeded."

At this point the prosecution wanted to admit as evidence a stack of letters written by

42. Armour Evans in a conversation with Ina Turner Gray, October 13, 1975. Rev. George Hathaway Parkinson, son-in-law of E. C. Pollard, one of Lowther's peers in the ministry in 1902, told Evans in Chicago about his father-in-law's assessment of the choosing of the "select number." After the trial, Pollard told Lowther, "You made the mistake when you challenged your peers, because we don't agree with you, but we would not vote to put you out." In other words, Lowther might not have been judged so harshly by the older and more experienced ministers of the conference.

43. *Wichita Daily Eagle*, March 27, 1902. Later the proceedings were moved to the church basement for greater secrecy. The leaking of the trial information to the press angered Bishop Mallalieu. He was quoted in the *Eagle*, March 29, 1902, as follows: "The report of the proceedings of the trial commission are reported in this morning's paper [*Wichita Daily Eagle*]. Either some one connected with the case has given the information away or the reporter listened on the outside. . . . An effort should be made to find who has given the secrets away." But the news story concluded with "all attempts, however, to find the source of the *Eagle's* story have failed."

44. *Arkansas City Daily Traveler*, March 28, 1902.

45. *Ibid.*

46. *Wichita Daily Eagle*, March 28, 1902.

37. *Ibid.* Also Southwest Kansas Conference "Journal," 1900, p. 82.

38. *Ibid.*

39. *Winfield Courier*, April 3, 1902. Wood, evidently an old friend from the Illinois M. E. Conference, was chosen by Lowther to represent him. One newspaper account stated that Wood had received legal training before entering the ministry.

40. "The Conference," *Winfield Daily Courier*, March 28, 1902.

41. Southwest Kansas Conference "Journal," 1902, pp. 66-68.

Lowther which contained statements held to be heretical. The defense objected to the introduction of materials which were not specified in the bill of charges.⁴⁷ The objection was sustained by Chairman Howes.

The lawyers for the church based their case on Lowther's "mis-interpretation of the fifth article of religion found in the M. E. Discipline."⁴⁸

The newspaper story continues with an account of the trial proceedings:

The entire afternoon was spent in the examination of witnesses for the prosecution. The first witness called was Rev. E. S. MacCartney, of Florence who was on the witness stand 45 minutes. Most of the questions were asked by the attorney for the prosecution who carefully covered all the points of the case. There was but little cross-examination by the attorneys for the defendant. "Were you at Frederick, Kansas, on February 26, 1902?" the witness was asked by Rev. Akin. "I was." "What was the occasion of your being there?" "A district conference of the McPherson district was in session." "Was the defendant at that conference?" "He was." "Did he have any part of the program?" "He did. He read a paper on the 'Atonement.'" "You have heard the specifications in the bill of charges?" "Yes." "Did the paper of Rev. Lowther contain what he is alleged to have said in the bill of charges?" "Yes." The second witness called was Rev. A. B. Hestwood. . . .⁴⁹

His testimony was not given in any press account, but he was quoted by a *Wichita Eagle* reporter as stating "that a Methodist minister should preach Methodist doctrine."⁵⁰ According to the newspaper accounts, no other witnesses were called, and by 6:30 p.m. Thursday, all the evidence, according to the prosecution, was in the hands of the court.⁵¹

When the court convened Friday afternoon, March 27, the prosecution reopened its case because the original copy of Lowther's "Atonement" had not been admitted as evidence. All of the comments which were made on Thursday were from memory and the attorney for the church wanted the court to have a copy of Lowther's paper.⁵²

The lead-off witness was Rev. J. A. Davis, presiding elder of the McPherson district where Lowther served. "Have you seen the copy of the paper which was read by Rev. Mr. Lowther at the district conference at Frederick

last February?" the witness was asked by T. W. Jeffery, the assistant prosecutor.

"I have seen the original paper and I made a copy of it, which I now have in my possession," Davis said. It was offered as evidence.⁵³

The attorneys for the defendant stated that they wished to introduce the original copy as evidence. Davis stated that the original copy had been changed since he made his copy. "The statement of Brother Davis will leave the committee under the impression that the defendant changed the papers with the idea of assisting his case," said Rev. W. H. Rose.⁵⁴

The committee chairman ruled that the copy of the original should be introduced as evidence. Comparisons were then made of the pertinent sections of both copies. After the reading was concluded, Rose stated that "there is no material difference in the two copies. We are willing that either should be introduced as evidence." The newspaper concludes the account: "Rev. Lowther was thus cleared from any suspicion of dishonesty or unfairness in connection with the case."⁵⁵

The trial continued on Friday evening with Lowther speaking in his own defense:

I am glad one of the books by which my teachings are to be tried is the Bible, for that book contains the highest examples of purity, the sweetest promises, the highest hopes of time and eternity. I am glad from the best biblical literature of modern time to have the severest tests applied. I have yielded no point of doctrine but have simply employed modern and scientific language to express it. I have gone three times carefully through the Bible, in order to bring the facts of science and our statements of theology and the Bible into harmony with each other. I have not found it necessary to change any fundamental principle of theology, but to clothe them in the language of modern thought rather than that of 150 years ago.⁵⁶

I do not deny that Eve was tempted by Satan, but I do deny that Satan appeared in the form of a serpent. My views are biblical, and not out of harmony with the essen-

53. *Ibid.* This action cast suspicion upon Davis, particularly concerning his motives regarding Lowther, and the legalities of the case. The *Daily Eagle*, March 30, 1902, carried this comment: "It is openly charged today Rev. J. A. Davis distributed copies of the alleged heretical paper among ministers before the conference convened, and that some who read the paper were on the trial committee."

54. *Ibid.*, March 29, 1902, says that this last remark by Rose "was stricken from the record."

55. After an examination of the original copy of Lowther's "Atonement," now in the Kansas West United Methodist Conference secretary's file, the authors find no evidence that the copy had been deliberately changed in any way. The text does contain check marks and notations presumably placed there by persons who wished to quote the marked passages. The cooperation of conference secretary, Gerry Winget, made this material available.

56. *Arkansas City Daily Traveler*, March 29, 1902, a quotation from an "alleged" verbatim account of Lowther's speech in his defense.

47. *Ibid.*

48. This article states, in part, that the "Holy Scriptures contain all things necessary to salvation." —See M. E. *Discipline*, 1900, p. 20.

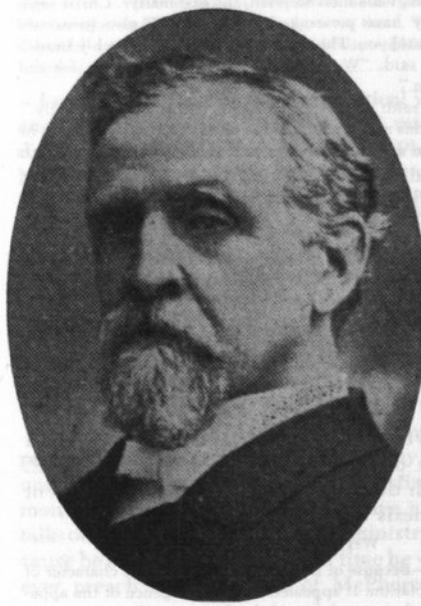
49. *Wichita Daily Eagle*, March 28, 1902.

50. *Ibid.*, March 27, 1902.

51. *Arkansas City Daily Traveler*, March 28, 1902.

52. *Wichita Daily Eagle*, March 29, 1902.

Bishop W.F. Mallalieu, *right*, wanted to keep the heresy trial of Granville Lowther secret, but area newspapers published detailed reports of the proceedings. C.J. Howes, *lower right*, was chairman of the "select number" who rendered the unanimous guilty verdict. J.A. Davis, *below*, was presiding elder of the McPherson district where Lowther served and a leader in bringing the charges against him. Photographs copied from *Official Minutes of the Southwest Kansas Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, 1902, 1908, and 1907 respectively.*



tials of Methodist doctrine. For years I have been studying to harmonize theology with nature.

I do not deny that Christ died for man; but I deny that he died to appease the wrath of God. I deny the doctrine that it was necessary for some one to suffer death or punishment to satisfy the claims of divine justice.

I know that the Bible speaks of salvation by the blood of Christ. I hold that the word "blood" means "life," and that Christ gave his life for us as a supreme manifestation of the love of God to man. We should remember that much of the Bible is written in figurative language.⁵⁷

In the verbatim account of his defense speech, Lowther presented his "evolutionary" views. He gave in detail, and in wording similar to that found in his original paper, historical background of the doctrine and concluded with his views of atonement:

Sixth—It is not vicarious in the sense that Christ was a voluntary victim to propitiate the wrath of the Father, so that he could place a quitclaim in the hands of Jehovah for the payment of all debts to Him. It was an example of that law of sacrifice that wins through all nature and is an expression of the very heart of God, as when a mother suffers for her child, the examples of love where persons have died for their friends, and where martyrs die for the truth. But it found its highest manifestation in Christ, where God was manifest in the flesh. This example of Christ should be multiplied by exactly the number of [his] disciples. Thus died Stephen, the first martyr. Christ said, "If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute [persecute] you. The servant is not greater than his Lord." John said: "We ought to lay down our lives for the brethren."

Paul said: "I am crucified in Christ." "I die daily." "Have this mind in which was also in Christ, who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God, but made himself of no reputation and became obedient unto death."

Now what principle of essential truth is subverted here? What would be the practical effects on men if they followed these teachings? It would result in a speedy answer to Christ's prayer: "That they all may be as we are, even as Thou Father art in me and I am thee that they also may be one in us." Now what harm can come to the church or the world from these teachings? If these ideas should prevail it would speedily save this world. Shall a minister of Christ be turned out for preaching the law of sacrifice commanded by Christ?⁵⁸

Lowther speaks specifically to the first charge of "mis-interpretation" of the M. E. Church doctrine, which classified the serpent in Genesis 3 with the beasts:

WHY CALLED A SERPENT?

First—Because of the subtle and serpentine character of the temptation. It appealed to the indulgence of the appetite and the ascendancy of the flesh over the spirit.

Second—The first written language was picture lan-

guage and the picture of a serpent would be the most natural figure by which to express the temptation. . . .

Third—It is common in all lands to call persons with dominant traits of character, by animals possessing these characteristics. John called the Jews serpents, a generation of vipers. Christ called Herod a fox. Judah was a lion's whelp. We have many Christian names such as Lion, Bear, Hawk, Bird, Wolf, Crow and Fox. The ensigns on the flags of nations are the "British Lion," "Russian Bear," "American Eagle," "Southern Confederated Serpent," etc. It does no violence to scripture interpretation, nor to any principle of truth to say that the serpent was a wily, cunning man, or that Satan appeared in the form of such a man, rather than to suppose what is impossible today and contrary to all known laws of life, that real serpents walked upright, reasoned and talked.⁵⁹

Following Lowther's speech which reportedly required "about three hours of time"⁶⁰ to deliver, the prosecutor Akin made the opening address for the church, followed by attorneys for the defense, and Akin making the summary.⁶¹

The "select number," after hearing the arguments and after taking the first vote which apparently went against the defendant, decided to give Lowther a chance to avoid expulsion from the ministry of the M. E. Church by signing an agreement not to preach in public or private the doctrines held to be heretical.⁶² The court communicated its proposition to the defendant and gave him until 8 a. m. the following morning (March 29) to make a reply.

Lowther's answer follows:

To the President and Committee:

In the case against me for heresy in which you have found me guilty of the charges preferred, [sic] and agree not to execute the penalty provided I would sign a paper agreeing not to teach in public nor in private the views which have been the basis of the charges against me. I beg leave to reply that I thank you for your feeling of regard and sympathy which offers me a possible way of escape from the natural consequences of your decision, but must decline to accept it, because I could not be honest with myself and the cause of Christ which I, as a minister of Christ, represent and enter into such an agreement.

Most truly yours,

G. LOWTHER⁶³

At the close of the morning session of the S. W. Kansas Conference, Bishop Mallalieu called for the report of the "select number." C. J. Howes, chairman, made the following report:

In the case of Rev. Granville Lowther, the Select

59. *Ibid.*

60. *Ibid.*, March 28, 1902.

61. *Ibid.*, March 29, 1902.

62. *Ibid.*

63. *Ibid.*

57. *Wichita Daily Eagle*, March 29, 1902, a summary of Lowther's speech in his defense.

58. *Arkansas City Daily Traveler*, March 29, 1902.

Number, after hearing the evidence and arguments of counsels, find the accused guilty of each and every specification set forth in the bill of charges and specifications; and we find further that the specifications sustain the charge; and we find him guilty of disseminating doctrines contrary to and subversive of the doctrines of the Methodist Episcopal Church, and the said Granville Lowther, having refused to sign a paper to the effect that he would not in the future teach or disseminate the doctrine taught in the paper forming the basis of the charges and specifications in the case, is hereby expelled from the ministry of the Methodist Episcopal Church.

Arkansas City, March 29, 1902.

The report was signed by the 11 members of the "select number." The decision was unanimous.⁶⁴

According to a newspaper account, Howes, before reading the guilty verdict, said: "This is one of the saddest moments of my life, and I am called upon to perform a duty that is one of the hardest I have ever attempted."⁶⁵ He commented upon the "kindly feeling" the committee had for Lowther. Following the reading of the guilty verdict, "over half the ministers were in tears and sobbing as if their hearts would break. The bishop dismissed the troubled congregation with 'O, that God may help us to stand by the old gospel!'"⁶⁶

According to the newspaper account, Lowther did not consider the charges of "heresy" to be of a serious nature. He told a reporter that "he did not expect the verdict of guilty and as yet had made no arrangements for his future." In the same interview, he is reported to have said that he did not intend to appeal the verdict to a higher court.⁶⁷

Another press account said that the defendant "would save all rights of appeal in his heresy case. It was further announced that he does not believe he will use them at this time, but he wanted to be prepared so that if the occasion ever arises that he does want a rehearing he can get it."⁶⁸

The 1902 M.E. "Journal" states that on Monday, March 31, the last day of the conference, that Lowther "filed notice of an appeal from the decision of the Select Number. The same previously authorized was recognized by the Conference."

According to the 1900 M. E. *Discipline*, a provision was made for an appeal from the decision by an annual conference. Trying such cases would be "triers of Appeals" which would constitute a judicial conference, and it would be made up of 15 elders from conferences "conveniently near." It "may reverse, in whole or in part, the finding of the Annual Conference, or it may remand the case for a new trial."⁶⁹

On Sunday evening, March 30, Lowther preached at the M.E. church in Geuda Springs and later returned to his home in McPherson, arriving on Thursday, April 3. That evening a "Grand Reception" was given to Lowther at the home, hardly the homecoming of a "heretic." The gala event was reported in detail in the McPherson *Weekly Republican*. There was much food, and "over three hundred" persons attended.

Prof. T. S. Johnson made a speech on the backbone of Mr. Lowther, which was very interesting, after which he recited a little poem entitled "To the Heretic," which he wrote himself. Mr. Lowther replied to the first speech by Mr. Johnson, making the evening very entertaining. . . . This reception will never be forgotten by Mr. Lowther or his many friends who were there. They all departed for their homes at a late hour, wishing Mr. Lowther success in the future.⁷⁰

Lowther's "evolutionary" theological views, and even his expulsion from the M. E. ministry did not dampen the feelings the McPherson Methodists felt for their pastor. During the S. W. Kansas annual conference it was reported that "some of the ministers are expressing a desire that they be not assigned to the pastorate of the McPherson church when the appointments are read . . . for the church has petitioned for the return of Rev. Mr. Lowther, and it is feared that his successor will not find his task an easy one."⁷¹ His successor was his counsel, W. H. Rose.⁷²

Remaining in McPherson, Lowther preached at the opera house on Sunday afternoon, April 7, and had a "very interesting sermon on 'What is Man?'" He also gave a short talk on his departure from the ministry, because he says it might be the last time he would ever preach to the people of McPherson."⁷³

64. Southwest Kansas Conference "Journal," 1902, pp. 85-86.

65. Arkansas City *Daily Traveler*, March 29, 1902.

66. "Is Guilty of Heresy," Winfield *Daily Courier*, March 31, 1902.

67. Arkansas City *Daily Traveler*, March 29, 1902.

68. Winfield *Daily Courier*, April 1, 1902.

69. M. E. *Discipline*, 1900, p. 149.

70. McPherson *Weekly Republican*, April 4, 1902.

71. Wichita *Daily Eagle*, March 30, 1902.

72. Southwest Kansas Conference "Journal," 1902, p. 73.

73. McPherson *Weekly Republican*, April 11, 1902.

If Lowther intended to pursue his appeal of the guilty verdict from the "select number," he should have ceased his ministerial functions and not continued to preach. His "preaching" on two different occasions made an appeal impossible under church law, according to his counsel, C. G. Woods.⁷⁴ Woods said, "The records in the case were all straight and every preparation had been made to appeal when he (Lowther) announced that he did not wish to take the case up."⁷⁵ Woods was disappointed that Lowther "acted against the rules of the church." He felt the case would have been "won in the higher court," because "the only reason it was lost was the personal prejudice entertained by some of the members of the trial committee against Lowther on account of his political views."⁷⁶

IV. EVALUATION OF THE TRIAL

AS ONE VIEWS the disturbing "heresy" trial period in the life of Granville Lowther from a distance of nearly three quarters of a century, the question which surfaces is: "Was Lowther a heretic or herald?"

He was tried for "mis-interpreting" doctrines of faith in the M. E. Church *Discipline* of 1900. Found guilty, he was "expelled from the ministry of the M. E. Church." This might have been a crushing blow to a lesser person. He was hurt, but was able to overcome much of the personal trauma of the trial and its aftermath, and distinguished himself in the field of horticulture. He also found fulfillment in the ministry of another denomination.

What can be said about the trial itself? As one studies the press account of the proceedings in detail, the "heresy" issue fades into the background, and a conspiracy of sorts against Lowther begins to emerge.

It was true that he did present an "evolutionary" interpretation of the atonement concept that departed from the orthodox position, but it was done openly before his district conference.

This was a period in our history when Darwinian thought was being felt in theological

circles many places in the world. Biblical studies were being invaded with the "higher textual criticism" philosophy. The scholars whose works were read and studied by Lowther were presenting different interpretations of the traditional doctrines of God, Man, and Society, which later infiltrated into all modern theological thought.

It seems unfair that Lowther was singled out to be tried for holding "Heretical" beliefs as though he were the only M. E. minister who held such ideas. One newspaper report stated "that some [meaning Lowther's brother ministers] thought the charges against him were trivial, and non-essential. Some ministers stated the Rev. Lowther was not the only heretic in the conference."⁷⁷

Even Bishop Mallalieu, the episcopal leader, who presided over the 1902 M. E. conference and whose theology was "revivalistic" in nature, stated "that the disbarred minister was heretical at some points, but if the conference wants to split on doctrine, there were several other ministers who ought to be disbarred."⁷⁸

It is doubtful that the trial would have been held had it not been for the rather devious work of Lowther's presiding elder, J. A. Davis. It was a motion by Davis that brought the charges against the defendant to the floor of the conference.⁷⁹ According to the testimony, Davis secured the original atonement paper, and made a copy of it. One account states he "distributed copies of the alleged heretical paper among ministers before the conference convened, and that some who had read the paper were on the trial committee."⁸⁰

This action was contrary to proper legal and disciplinary procedure outlined in the 1900 M. E. *Discipline*, dealing with "a member of an Annual Conference who disseminates, publicly or privately, doctrines which are contrary to (the) Articles of Religion."

In the interval between the sessions of the Annual Conference the Presiding Elder shall call not less than five or more than nine Members of the Conference to investigate the case, and, if possible, bring the accused and the accuser face to face. He shall preside throughout the proceedings,

74. Winfield Courier, April 24, 1902.

75. *Ibid.* Woods must have been familiar with an 1860 General Conference decision which stated "the appellant, since his expulsion, has continued to preach as if still in full ministerial powers . . . has forfeited his right of appeal." — Reported in F. J. Cooke, *The Judicial Decisions of the General Conference of the M. E. Church* (Cincinnati, Jennings & Pye, 1903), p. 49.

76. Winfield Courier, April 24, 1902.

77. Wichita Daily Eagle, March 30, 1902.

78. Dodge City Globe-Republican, April 3, 1902. Massachusetts born Wilbur F. Mallalieu (1828-1911), who presided at the 1902 M. E. conference in Arkansas City, was the author of several books, including one on the subject of revivals, *The Why, When, and How of Revivals*—F. D. Leete, *Methodist Bishops* (Nashville, Parthenon Press, 1948).

79. Southwest Kansas Conference "Journal," 1902, pp. 81-82.

80. Wichita Daily Eagle, March 30, 1902.

and shall certify and declare the verdict of the Committee; and shall cause a correct record of the charges, specifications, proceedings, and the evidence in the investigation to be kept and transmitted to the Annual Conference.⁸¹

Had Davis felt that there were justifiable reasons for bringing charges against Lowther for "disseminating" views contrary to the "Articles of Religion," he should have followed the disciplinary procedures. Instead he circulated copies of the atonement paper among the ministers of the McPherson district, and apparently sanctioned the circulation of one or more bills of charges.⁸²

It appears that Davis personally set out to damage the ministerial career of Granville Lowther, and apparently was aided by ministers of the McPherson district. No doubt they were threatened by Lowther's erudition and his popularity. Mutual hostility may have been building between Lowther and Davis over a period of years. Both joined the conference in 1886.⁸³

Lowther gave much leadership to the church, served large congregations, was elected to General Conference, and gave exceptional guidance and help to the S. W. Conference college in Winfield. There is no evidence that Davis was too highly regarded by the conference.

It is understandable that many of Lowther's peers were awed by his knowledge and abilities. They were provincial in theological outlook, and in order to join the conference, studied books prescribed by the M. E. *Discipline*. None were written by the then current European scholars. Most conference members were unfamiliar with modern Biblical scholarship and were so fearful of one of their peers who would advocate evolutionary interpretations of Biblical stories that they voted him out of the ministry.⁸⁴ They won their point, but it is questionable that the conference benefited by losing the talents of such a leader as Granville Lowther.

But, notwithstanding the provinciality of Kansas clergy in the early 1900's, the theological climate was changing, and in 1902 in

Frederick, Granville Lowther presented an interpretation of a portion of the Adam and Eve stories in Genesis that was one of many to be studied, discussed, and accepted by later generations of Methodist ministers and lay people.

V. AFTERMATH

SOME OF THE tragic dimensions of the trial were reflected in the disrupted lives of at least two of the five Lowther children.

In 1898 the young son, Charles, had dropped out of Southwest Kansas College to serve as a supply minister at Roy in present Oklahoma. The next three years he preached at Geuda Springs. By 1902 he had decided to join the Southwest Kansas Conference and give up his earlier ambition of being an editor or a printer which he had held in 1895 when he was listed as publisher and business manager of the *Southwestern Collegian*.⁸⁵ That same year his older brother John Franklin was associate editor of the paper and his father was vice-president of the college and chairman of the executive committee of the board of trustees. At that point the college was well supplied with Lowthers.

But once again Charles's vocational plans were changed. An item in the March 31, 1902, *Winfield Courier* puts it succinctly: "Charley Lowther was up for admission to the ministry at the Arkansas City Conference, but after the action taken by that body against his father, refused to join."

Charles never became a Methodist preacher, but he did join the ministry of the Congregational Church.⁸⁶ An entertaining writer, he has at least two books to his credit which memorialize those early days—*Dodge City, Kansas* and *Panhandle Parson*.

For the daughter Lola E., the situation was quite different but just as traumatic. She was engaged to Jesse Clyde Fisher who graduated from Southwestern and joined the conference on trial in 1901. But, as she wrote in 1954, "our engagement was broken when the church had the heresy trial. I could not then marry a Methodist minister."⁸⁷

Fisher married Effie Pyle and spend eight

81. M. E. *Discipline*, 1900, para. 222, sec. 1.

82. "Heresy Trial," *Arkansas City Daily Traveler*, March 28, 1902. Was Davis responsible for collecting the letters written by Lowther and alleged to be heretical? Circumstantial evidence appears to indicate that he was.

83. Southwest Kansas Conference "Journal," 1902, p. 66.

84. According to his counsel, his political views were also feared.

85. C. Lowther, *Panhandle Parson*, p. 67.

86. This information comes from his daughter, Mrs. Carroll M. Bartell, in a letter from Ann Grange, niece of Charles Lowther and granddaughter of Granville Lowther, written to Ina Turner Gray on April 10, 1976.

87. Letter to Grace Hayes Jones.

years as a missionary in India. He was serving as superintendent of the Liberal district when she died in 1935.

By this time Lola's father was dead so her housekeeping duties for him had ended and she was living in the East near her sisters' families. Jesse went to see her and they were married in 1936. After his death in 1951 she took his place on the board of trustees of Southwestern College and gave his valuable

collection of Indian artifacts to the college. According to a former president, Dr. C. Orville Strohl, Mrs. Fisher was very generous in her support of the college which her father had once headed and once "owned."⁸⁸ Today the Fisher collection is the one tangible evidence on campus of a daughter's loyalty and of the man who saved the college but lost his own good name.

88. Interview, March 3, 1976.