

Rev. JOSEPH ALEXANDER LAWTON.

2 Dec. 1811-



Rev. JOSEPH ALEXANDER LAWTON, of Allendale, Barnwell county, South Carolina, was born December 9th, 1811, in the vicinity of Natchez, Mississippi, where his father, Rev. J. J. Lawton, in company with his brother, Benjamin T. D. Lawton, and Thomas Polhill, with their families, had emigrated and lived two years; but in consequence of Indian hostilities, returned to Black Swamp, Beaufort district, South Carolina.

At this place Joseph A. remained at school, enjoying the advantages of an academy of very high order, until he was about fifteen years of age, when he went to Screven county, Georgia, near Sylvania, where he lived until he was twenty. While living in Georgia, he came to South Carolina on a visit, and attended an interesting

religious meeting, conducted by Rev. Daniel Baker, a Presbyterian minister. About this time, it pleased God to open his eyes, and show him clearly the way

and plan of salvation, under a sermon preached by that devoted servant of God—the Rev. James C. Furman, D.D.

He at once embraced religion, and was baptized by Rev. Isaac Nichols, Sr., with about a dozen others, of whom were James T. Sweat, Lawrence Robert, George Kempton and Richard Furman, all of whom became ministers of the Gospel. Very soon after this, he went to Savannah, Georgia, and engaged in mercantile pursuits for a year; his was while Rev. H. O. Weyer was the pastor; and it was while in Savannah, with other young men, that he began to exercise his gifts for the Gospel ministry. From Savannah he went to the Furman University, or "Institute," as it was then called, as fellow-students with James H. DeVotie and Edward Lathrop. It was about this time that he received from the Black Swamp church, of which he was a member, a license to preach. It is worthy of note, that at the same time his license was granted, the same privilege was conferred upon his father, Rev. J. J. Lawton, and also upon Rev. James T. Sweat, Dr. Joseph T. Robert, George Kempton, Lawrence Robert and Richard Furman. What an interesting and unusual occurrence—father and son both going to the Master's work at the same time!

He remained at the Institute, then under the charge of Dr. Samuel Furman and Jesse Hartwell, for two years, when the Institute suspended its exercises, and he went on to Madison University, New York, where he remained three years and graduated. While a student at Madison, he visited South Carolina, and married, in Beaufort, April, 1836, Mrs. M. S. Barksdale, a woman of devoted piety and sterling character, who proved a valuable coadjutor and helpmeet in the Christian ministry for a term of forty-four years.

Having graduated at Madison, he returned and settled at Allendale, South Carolina, when he was called to the pastorate of the Pipe Creek church, and regularly ordained to the work of the Gospel ministry in 1838, from which time he has served very acceptably and faithfully a number of churches, among them the Philadelphia Baptist church, in Barnwell county; Mount Arnon, for ten or twelve years; Hilton Head and Dawfuskie, for three years. Then he went to Charleston, South Carolina, and spent a year in trying to build up a Baptist interest in that portion of the city known as the "Neck."

About this time failing health forced him to repair to Marietta, Georgia, where he spent some time, and returned to South Carolina and took charge of the Smyrna and Arnon churches. In 1855 the Concord church was organized, and his services secured as pastor, at the same time giving one Sabbath in the month to the church at Barnwell Court-house, for one year. His connection as the beloved and respected pastor of Concord church, lasted for eighteen years, and he only left them when they had procured his successor, in the person of Rev. A. B. Estes, one of his former deacons.

The Allendale Baptist church then called him as their pastor; he accepted the call, and has been serving that church without interruption until the present time. In addition to his various duties as pastor, from time to time, he has served as clerk and Moderator of the Savannah River Association, chairman of the Executive Board, one of the trustees of Furman University, and, doubtless, has officiated at a greater number of funerals, and married a greater number of couples, than any country minister of his age now living.

During his days of prosperity, almost every worthy object, and a host of young men—especially worthy young ministers—were the recipients of his benevolence and kindness. The writer has been personally and intimately acquainted and associated with him for a number of years—through peace and through war, through prosperity and through adversity, in health, and in affliction and bereavement. In his opinion a more beautiful, unselfish and lovely Christian character could not be found. To know Joseph Alexander Lawton is to love and respect him. Wherever he lived, wherever he went, wherever he is known, the rich and poor, the high and low, the old and the young, all honor, respect and love him as a true and devoted Christian, neighbor and friend. So gentle, so pleasant, so sympathetic and kind to all.

It may be truly said of him, as it was said of one of old, "There is none like him in the earth; a perfect and an upright man; one that feareth God and escheweth evil."