ACCOUNT OF FUNERAL

OF

Dr. L. K. Williams

Pastor Olivet Baptist Church, Chicago
Pres. of National Baptist Convention, Inc.
V. Pres. of Baptist World's Alliance

AS REPORTED BY

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Foreword

Baltimore, Maryland

November 16th, 1940

Rev. E. W. White, the distinguished and dignified pastor of the Providence Baptist Church, the Auditor of the National Baptist Convention, the News Commentator, and the Expositor of the Sunday School Lesson for the Baptist Conference, Baltimore and Vicinity, who was present at the funeral services for the Late Rev. L. K. Williams, President of the National Baptist Convention, Inc. and pastor of Olivet Baptist Church, Chicago, Illinois, gave such an exhaustive and descriptive report of the services as seen and heard by him, and which report so inspired and captivated the Conference, that by a unanimous vote Dr. White was requested by the Conference to give permission to have such helpful and far-reaching report printed: Accordingly the conference appointed a committee for the superintending of the printing: This Dr. White gave his consent.

This little pamphlet contains a descriptive statement and account of the funeral services for the late Dr. L. K. Williams. It also rings clear and loud in depicting the glorious deeds of the deceased and vindicates his efforts in trying to make a better world and safer country. The author is well and widely known for his strong character and grip on any subject he handles, and for an awakening and captivating style. These qualities are pregnant throughout the pages of this pamphlet. He knows well what it is. He believes it worth delivering, and he does it in an earnest, forthwith manner. He is ornate. He is earnest enough to be.

The whole assembly of discussion is calculated to inform and stimulate the denomination, and will make excellent and informative reading for other people, multitudes of whom dreadfully need to know what is so lucidly stated in this booklet. It covers present truths, especially needed now when so many are trying to obscure the truth by enveloping the whole sad accident in a dense fog of sentimentalism.

We, as Baptist are deeply indebted to Dr. White for the service he has rendered in giving us real facts of the funeral services for Dr. Williams. The incident is very beautiful and abounds in liturgical expressions, poetic beauty, rhythmic symetry, and highly descriptive of the circumstances which it presents. It echoes and heralds the facts just as they transpired.

By WILLIS J. WINSTON,

Nov. 16th, 1940.

DR. L. K. WILLIAMS' GOING

A Texas Son, admired by the Reporter

Chicago, Illinois - November 6, 1940

The sun is more or less brightly shining and smiling through light drifting cirus clouds, partly neutralizing the effect of a stiff chilly wind that whips through a milling crowd that is increasing every moment, as taxi after taxi delivers tired and weary passengers who had come from extremes like Maine and Florida and from Los Angeles and New York. The hands of the clock are climbing around 9:30 A. M.

The great historic Olivet Baptist Church is at this moment more than four-fifths filled. The ticket office opened to supply tickets of entrance to out of city ministers and seats in funeral procession cars, are jammed, and operators confused.

Doors of entrance to the church are closed, except one small door on the side —this door is jammed and blocked by a surging mass of humanity trying to gain entrance—while through the same little door, a line which had gained entrance to vestibules and anti-rooms, and couldn't get into the auditorium, are pushing and forcing their way out. All is confusion around the door.

We who have credentials of entrance and even tickets for seats in cars, fight and push our way to the door. Voices of officers of the National Baptist Convention, U. S. A., such as Dr. Jernagan, President of Sunday School Congress and others, are crying out, "we are officers, let us get in," but to this surging crowd, an officer of the convention or of the Law meant nothing.

Pushing and fighting we are near enough to the door for doorkeepers to reach out their hands and drag us in. Puffing and blowing we enter the auditorium where the atmosphere is calm and serene.

All seats are filled except reserved and roped seats for visiting ministers and family and relatives of the family of deceased; and ushers are fighting hard to hold these.

Now we are seated in center row of pews about six or seven seats from casket. The casket, a beautiful steel, and color, steel gray, costing anywhere between $1000 and $1,200.

Like a hanging garden above, and all 'round the casket a snowy crimson hewed bank of the choicest richest and super charming florals, of as matchless beauty and profusion that ever was cut from a garden, or arranged and designed by artistic hands, sit the floral tributes of thousands of heart broken lovers and admirers of one who is as firmly set in their hearts as the Rock of Gibraltar; florals whose aggregate cost must have surpassed a cold thousand dollars.

The big pipe organ with orchestra situated above the pulpit, to the rear, is softly playing sad but sweet strains of music which is falling in sweet and soothing cadence upon our ears, calming our nerves, comforting our hearts, assuaging our griefs, and wafting our souls to the very gates of heaven—mu-

sic! music! What a blessing is the right kind of music in such a time as this—and we are feasting on the kind that reaches head and heart.

More and more the crowds file in a church already filled—now the family and relatives file in—the crowds still squeezing and pushing in till the main auditorium seating (conservatively estimated about two thousand, had jammed in it, possibly three thousand, and in the forty or fifty class rooms and lecture rooms, possibly another thousand, making about four thousand on the inside with about eight thouand on the outside, many of whom are still clamoring for entrance.

Loud speakers, jutting out from four sides of the main building are standing by to carry the funeral services out to the milling crowd on the outside.

The great choir or choirs are now all seated. The faces of choir members, members of the church and closest friends are marked by a striking contrast to the faces of the few curiousity seekers who had gained entrance.

It was an audience marked with deep emotions and pent up feelings, mixed with crushing sorrow, mingled with some embarrassment and abasement because of some of the more unthoughtful, who through misunderstanding and misinterpretation of God's ways and God's character, had made various expressions of interpretations of the manner of the death by aeroplane, as evidence of God's disapproval and judgment. Enemies' tongues, too, had been wagging. But this of course is no unusual thing. The greatest men that have ever rendered the greatest service to humanity and have had the loudest praises heaped upon them, have also had the greatest calumny and abuse heaped upon them—Abraham Lincoln the great benefactor was slaughtered at the hands of an assasin. Accidents and tragedies have snuffed out the lives of the best men that ever lived, while thieves and robbers and exploiters have lived to ripe old ages and died natural deaths surrounded by friends with loving hands resting on their brows. Why was James Weldon Johnson's life snuffed out in an automobile accident? Why other aeroplane accidents? Why is Hitler allowed to continue? Why do "the good die young?" All these are God's mysteries that no man has ever been able to understand.

The only criticism I have against Dr. Williams, was the lack of prudence. His mission was sacred—any mission is sacred if it has for its purpose, help for humanity. When the freedom of at least nine millions of the fifteen million black folk is at stake, any mission that has their emancipation for its object, is sacred.

It is wicked and little for any man to think that a man like Dr. Williams, with his standing, officially and financially, would take such a chance just for the sake of the dollar. Some leaders do have pure motives. Everybody is not influenced solely by the dollar, even if you think it so. Few ministers or laymen have been able to get for the race what Dr. Williams has.

But there is evidence of bewilderment in the faces of dear friends. Now and then a subdued sob is heard, and then a bursting heart-rendering outcry: "Oh, Oh, our dear pastor is gone." And then a groan and a sigh, a member of the church, a relative or a close friend or comrade.

The big pipe organ and the orchestra are still chanting sweet strains of music —for twenty-four hours they had never ceased to chant; soothing and assuaging

the torrents of grief and sorrow—the feeling is intense—the determination is adamant, as the people seemed to say: "Though he slay me, yet will I trust him."

And now the hands of the clock are approaching 11 A. M. Those on programme are taking places on the rostrum. Dr. G. A. Crawley and I are seated together—Drs. A. J. Payne and Baxter Matthews and Mr. Robert Williams, undertaker of East Baltimore, are just behind us. Before us and behind us, in same row, are seated National officers of the convention who could not get room on rostrum; state presidents and field secretaries—the Baptit nation is here (both conventions). Baptist leaders of national bodies (white) are present. Chicago colored and white are present either inside or outside.

Programmes previously secured are being scanned. The Master of Ceremonies is now standing announcing the beginning of the programme which is to be as follows: (read).

The hands of the clock are moving up to 11 A. M. Now it is ten minutes to eleven, now nine, now eight; now seven.

The stage is set—all is tense—the silence is serene—the hush is deep. The choir and orchestra have placed their music—the organist is at the console, and we wait for the first strains of the robed choir to break the silence with "Close to Thee, Close to Thee, all along my pilgrim journey, etc."

But hark! A voice in the rear, "Fire!" The whole audience swerves as if by magic—as quickly another, "There is no fire"—"Sit down be quiet." Many halted and sat down — as quickly another voice rang out "Fire!" Again it is denied and an usher rushing among the people,—"Sit down folk—It's a ruse by the people on the outside to firighten you so as to get your seats"—"Sit down." "Sit down—don't let them fool you." (The fire was even then raging in the roof and the outside, but even the ushers didn't know it)

Another voice cried: "Fire"—another swerve and rush as more people rush the doors, as many had done at the very first cry of fire.

Then appears a policeman and a fireman on the gallery in front, and the policeman says: "It's a fire but we have it under control—sit down." (This of course, was to prevent a stampede). They begin to direct choir out. Then the policeman takes the mike, the people about one half making for the door and the other half still hesitant, and says:

"There has been a fire, but it is out now. But, the firemen want the building cleared. (colored policeman) You will please leave single file." A slight hesitation by many till the officer urged from the mike: "Move out people, move out—but don't rush." He stands at the mike giving directions while other policemen and firemen are directing and pointing the people to the various doors. Every exit was now open but one that was jammed with fire fighters, and guarded by police.

Some despairing of reaching the doors begin to leap from windows. Dr. Crawley and I for the first time rise and move calmly towards the doors behind the crowd. Mr. Williams joins us. Neither is excited but say to each other, let's not get in the jams.

So we are among the last to walk out; the church is surrounded with fire fighting apparatus and smoke is belching, and in the annex building next to pulpit, the third story is crushing in. Eight inch in diameter streams are

shooting all over the building. Firemen are climbing ladders.

All are out, and now the casket is wheeled out and such of the floral not too badly damaged. And then the flames leaped through the roof and the walls and part of the roof collapsed. The Fire Marshall estimated the damage at $50,000 which is covered by insurance.

By a miracle of Providence only, four thousand people were ushered out of a building chocked and jammed to the last inch with casualties of only one broken leg and one broken arm, a few bruises and a few cut by glass or trampled—the most damage to those who jumped out of windows.

Another chapter is now written to the tragedy of seven days ago, and the tongues of unthoughtful people begin to wag anew: According to them, "God was moving.' Judgment was being meted. "Did you ever see the like before?" And other expressions in sympathy. "Isn't it a shame"—"Isn't it a pity"—"The poor man killed and escaped being burned up by gas now his dead body just narrowly escaped being burned up."

Then a despairing cry from some member—"Oh, oh, our dear pastor"—then a male member, "Our dear pastor gone and now our church gone, while another responds: "We can get back our church, but can't get back our pastor."

Then another despairing woman, "Oh, oh, our dear pastor dead; his body snatched from the fire and drug around. Oh! Oh! Oh!" I could go on for one hour repeating heart rendering sympathetic expressions.

The fire being now under control, the next move is being contemplated—it is first decided to have no funeral but dismiss the body from the undertakers, to which place it had been returned. After preparations are under way, it is then changed, and it is decided to hold the funeral in front of church on streets, and have memorial later. This is to begin at 2:30 P. M. but gets under way at 3 P. M. It had to be brief.

The participants in a room adjacent to the church, speak through a microphone to those standing in the park in front of the church and on the streets which had been roped off.

Master of Ceremonies is now calling the people to order—the Good Will Chorus with Isaacs, Gales, Dorsey and others, are at the microphones, the choir not able to serve in the little room.

The Master of Ceremonies acknowledges receipt of telegrams, resolutions, etc., and states only part of a brief programme can be rendered, and that the "Good Will Chorus" was singing.

Then from the mike come the strains: "Will the Lord Remember Me," other numbers sang were: "Breathe on Me,' "Amazing Grace," "When I Come to the End of My Journey." Rev. R. C. Barbour is reading part of the obituary, and Dr. A. L. Boone is delivering the eulogy, using as a text: "A prince and a great man is fallen in Israel." Other numbers briefly given, all filled with deep emotions, but portraying the noble deeds of a great human benefactor—a character whose deeds of greatness and goodness can never be portrayed in words, one of the greatest Baptist statesmen that ever opened a Bible is my personal opinion.

Thus was written one of the most glamorous and heart rendering chapters ever written in religious history.

We are stunned and dazed, and as we see the last funeral car of the two

mile procession go out of sight, we wonder are we dreaming, have we passed through a horrid nightmare? But alas, it is true: and "There is an appointed time to man upon earth." And none of us know how or when or by what means we may be called home. "We spend our years as a tale that is told."

We dare not try to understand all of God's ways. We are finite.—He is infinite.

"We now see through a glass darkly, but then face to face."

"Now we know in part," but then shall we know even as we are known."

Thank God every true believer, while he can not always understand God, can say with the Psalmist:

"As for me, I will behold thy face in righteousness: I shall be satisfied, when I awake with thy likeness.'"

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