

William D. Moore (1824-96), Amateur Geologist of Mississippi

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It is now nearly ninety years since William D. Moore, then professor of English at the University of Mississippi, collaborated with Eugene W. Hilgard on his famous geological report of that State. The archivists and historians have lost Moore from their records (if, indeed, they ever sought seriously for information of him), so that what was written five years ago² of W. D. Moore (in another connection) remains as true as it was then: "No record of whence he came, or whither went (when the University closed in 1861), is to be found at the University." Since the present writer has been for some time gathering materials on the teaching of science in certain Southern universities and colleges before the Civil War, and since there is now no reason for obscurity about this gifted amateur of science, it seems well to put on paper the outlines, at least, of what we know of his life and work.

William D. Moore was born at Harper's Ferry, Jefferson County, Va., on January 15, 1824. He was a precocious lad, and (as his parents were persons of some means) he was prepared for college at a select school or academy in Elizabeth City County, near present Fortress Monroe. He then, at the early age of fourteen or fifteen, entered the Western University of Pennsylvania³, at Allegheny City near Pittsburgh. From this college he was graduated with the degree of A.B. in 1841. Following graduation, Moore attended for three years the Western Theological Seminary⁴, also at Allegheny City; in April, 1845 (when he had just passed his twenty-first birthday), he was licensed to preach by the Ohio Presbytery of the Presbyterian Church, and three months later was ordained by the Redstone Presbytery in western Pennsylvania⁵. For ten years, Moore was a Presbyterian minister in the western part of the State—pastor at Long Run (Armstrong County) from 1845 to 1850, and stated supply there from 1854 to 1856; and pastor at Greensburg (Westmoreland County) from 1850 to 1854. He probably did some teaching in the towns where he had pastoral charges. It was at Greensburg that Moore met a young law-year, Edgar Cowan⁶, later (1861-67) United States senator from

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²S. W. Geiser, "Note on Dr. Francis Moore (1808-1864)" (*Southwestern Historical Quarterly*, 47, 1944, 422n).

³Now the University of Pittsburgh. Chartered first in 1787 as "Pittsburgh Academy"; took a new charter in 1819 as the "Western University of Pennsylvania." It began collegiate instruction in 1822, and the first building was erected by State appropriation. In 1845 and 1849 fires destroyed the college buildings, so for some time the work was suspended. In 1908 the name was changed to present title.

⁴The Western Theological Seminary of the Presbyterian Church was organized in 1827 or 1828, and chartered in 1844.

⁵E. C. Scott, *Ministerial Directory of the Presbyterian Church, U.S., 1861-1941*, 1942, 514.

⁶EDGAR COWAN (1815-85); A. B., Franklin College, New Athens, Ohio; by turns he became a raftsmen, boat-builder, schoolmaster, student of medicine, and student of law. Was admitted to the bar in 1842, and began practice in Greensburg, Pa., in the county of his birth. Presidential elector on the Republican ticket of 1860, and U.S. senator from 1861 to 1867. He was one of the immortals who voted for acquittal in the impeachment trial of Andrew Johnson. This killed him politically; even his nomination as Minister to Austria by President Johnson (January, 1867) was not confirmed by the Senate. (*Biographical Directory of the American Congress, 1774-1927*, 1928, 851.)

Pennsylvania. The two became great friends, and it was through this friendship that Moore came later into the study of law.

In 1855, Moore (whose interests had always been in the educational field) followed his bent and was "dismissed" from his presbytery to one in Mississippi, there to become professor of languages (under the presidency of Dr. James Purviance) at Oakland College⁷, a Presbyterian school in Jefferson County, a short distance north of Natchez. Here he was professor for three years, until called to the newly-established chair of English Literature in the University of Mississippi at Oxford, under the chancellorship of Dr. Frederick Augustus Porter Barnard⁸. He held this chair until the closing of the University in September of 1861. The fact that Moore was elected, at the early age of 34 to a professorship under Barnard is indicative of the caliber of the man, as Barnard was notably a good judge of men and scholarship.

The chair to which Moore was elected was the first of the sort to be established in any Southern college or university⁹. From 1848 (the year of the opening of the University of Mississippi) until 1858, such subjects as rhetoric, elocution, and belles lettres were parts of a large omnibus. When Chancellor Barnard (1858) recommended the creation of a chair of English, Moore was elected professor. This is the bare record of his appointment in the minutes of the trustees of the university. "The course of study in English that appears in the next year's catalogue," says Dean David H. Bishop¹⁰, "shows that he was intelligent. Without over-emphasis on philology, he made an historical approach." Moore extended the work previously offered in English (Freshman grammar, Sophomore rhetoric and punctuation, Junior figures of speech and sentence-analysis) to a fourth year consisting of an historical study of English literature, and a study of Anglo-Saxon. Moore's tendency possibly veered toward the philological, but in this he had some precedent—the leading college of the South, the University of Virginia, while it gave instruction in Anglo-Saxon from the year 1825, did not have a "school" of the English language and literature until 1882¹¹.

Moore served during the last three years of Chancellor Barnard's headship of the University of Mississippi. As colleagues he had Edward Carlisle Boynton¹² (chemistry), George W. Carter¹³ and his successor, L. Q. C. Lamar (metaphysics and logic), Burton Norvell Har-

⁷Oakland College was founded in 1830, about seven miles from Rodney, Miss., by Rev. Jeremiah Chamberlain, a missionary sent out by the General Presbyterian Board of Domestic Missions. He was a man of great moral force. In 1850, Dr. Chamberlain was stabbed to death at the front gate of his cottage on the campus by one Briscoe, a hot-headed Secessionist, who believed that the Doctor was favoring the doctrines of the Unionist party in his teachings. The college gradually declined because of the War and yellow-fever epidemics. The last listing I find of Oakland College in the reports of the U.S. Commissioner of Education is in that for the year 1871. Many of the old buildings of Oakland College are now used by the Alcorn Agricultural & Mechanical College, Alcorn, Miss. (See, also, C. S. Sydnor, *A Gentleman of the Old Natchez Region*, 1938, 229.)

⁸"Autobiography of Dr. F. A. P. Barnard" (*Publ. Miss. Hist. Society*, 12, 1912, 107-22; see, also, J. W. Johnson, *ibid.*, 12, 1912, 136-47.)

⁹*Historical Catalogue of the University of Mississippi, 1849-1909*, 1910, 45.

¹⁰David H. Bishop to S. W. Geiser, August 19, 1942.

¹¹Note, *supra*, p. 45.

¹²EDWARD CARLISLE BOYNTON (1824-93). See *DAB*, 2, 1929, 537.

¹³GEORGE WASHINGTON CARTER, Methodist minister, born in Virginia, where in 1847 he entered the Methodist itineracy; transferred to the Memphis Conference, 1858, and the Texas Conference, 1860; president of Soule University, 1860-61; C.S.A., left Texas Conference without being expelled, 1865. See H. C. Marmoth, *War, Politics, and Reconstruction* . . ., 1930, pp. 109-40, *passim*; also F. A. P. Barnard (Note 8, *supra*, pp. 114, 121); also John Fulton, *Memoirs of Frederick A. P. Barnard*, 1896, *passim*.

rison¹⁴ (physics), Jordan McCullough Phipps (mathematics), Wilson Gaines Richardson¹⁵ (Latin and modern languages), William F. Stearns and J. F. Trotter (law), and Henry Whitehorne (Greek). Another man, not a member of the faculty, but occupying offices in the university buildings, was Eugene Woldemar Hilgard (Ph.D., *summa cum laude*, Heidelberg, 1853.) Hilgard was State Geologist of Mississippi; his German training in the field of the sciences was characteristically wide and deep. His later work, as professor in the University of Michigan and the University of California gained Hilgard international recognition that earned him his *Jubilaumsdoktorat* at Heidelberg (1903), fifty years after the gaining of his degree in course.

Moore was a man of the most diverse interests. His interest in geology had been awakened in his early years at Harper's Ferry—one of the most strikingly beautiful and instructive geological localities of the Appalachian highlands—and the early years of his pastorate in western Pennsylvania nourished this interest. His years at the Western University of Pennsylvania were doubtless stimulating and provocative ones. Dr. Robert Bruce¹⁶, his old president at Western University, was a graduate of the University of Edinburgh (1798), and then for five years had studied theology under the approval of the Associate Presbytery of Perth; and came to America as a missionary in 1806. Bruce was just the man to touch deeply an impressionable, gifted youth; and was as broadly trained as Scottish education would permit. The natural sciences were deeply cultivated and the university deservedly famous for its scientific work in Bruce's day—about this time (1795-97), Berthold Georg Niebuhr, the future historian of Rome, was sent to Edinburgh for a scientific education!

Coming to the University of Mississippi as a young man (he was in his thirty-fifth year), Moore entered actively into the life and work of the university. In Barnard, he recognized one of the soundest, most progressive educators in the United States, and a scholar of the first rank in the field of science. Captain Boynton was an excellent chemist; and in Hilgard, Moore found a scientist who ranked with Chancellor Barnard—no mean compliment. Professor William F. Stearns of the law department of the university, a Northern man long resident in the South, had interests that transcended the limits of his field, and L. Q. C. Lamar, graduate of old Emory College at Oxford, Ga., professor of metaphysics and logic, was also a gifted mathematician. He was a son-in-law of the former president of the university, Judge Longstreet; and was later to win fame for himself in the law, in the Senate, as Cabinet member, and on the Supreme Bench of the United States. Acquaintance with Stearns and Lamar deepened Moore's interest in the law. But for that matter. Moore took great interest in almost all fields. He accompanied Dr. Hilgard, when opportunity offered, on his

¹⁴BURTON NORVELL HARRISON (1838-1904) was later (1862-65) private secretary to President Jefferson Davis, on the recommendation of L. Q. C. Lamar. A kinsman of Chancellor Barnard, he attended the University of Mississippi, 1854-55; took his A.B. at Yale, 1859. (See biography by his son, Fairfax Harrison, in *Aris Sonis Focisque*, 1910, esp. pp. 144-50.)

¹⁵WILSON GAINES RICHARDSON (1825-86.) A former student of Chancellor Barnard at the University of Alabama. A.B., Alabama, 1841; adjunct professor, Alabama, 1845-50; travel and study in Europe, 1850-54; professor, University of Mississippi, 1854-60; professor at Davidson College, 1866-74; Central University, Richmond, Ky., 1874-78; Austin College in Texas, 1878-81. He was one of George W. Carter's backers in the 1859-60 cabal against Barnard at the University of Mississippi.

¹⁶DR. ROBERT BRUCE (1776-1846). For biography, see W. B. Sprague, *Annals of the American Pulpit*, 9, 1869, iii, 90.

geological field trips. Indeed, he was in many ways a great help to Hilgard in his work; when Hilgard in 1860 published his report on the geology and agriculture of Mississippi, he acknowledged the great aid received from Moore. Writing forty years after the event, Hilgard¹⁷ said: ". . . The printing [of my report] was begun at Jackson in May, 1860; the latter parts of the report were largely written while the first portions were passing through the press. But several forms were not yet in print when in August imperative matters called me to Europe, and Professor W. D. Moore, who had previously aided me in working up the lists of fossils, undertook to see the remainder of the work through the press . . ." And in the work itself, the following contemporary acknowledgment: "My most special acknowledgments are due to Prof. W. D. Moore . . . for voluntary assistance not merely occasional, but of the most comprehensive kind and in part of the most toilsome character. . . . I owe to his patient labor the systematic arrangement and labeling of the Survey collections at Oxford . . . and the compilation of the catalogues of the fossils is almost entirely the fruit of his labor. Of fieldwork I owe him the re-examination and more accurate tracing out of the deposits of hydraulic limestone in Tishomingo, the result of which is given in the appendix. . . ."¹⁸ It will be seen from the foregoing that Moore's help was not casual or merely clerical.

The work of the University was broken up with the onset of the Civil War. Chancellor Barnard had hoped that the struggle would be short—that there would be an accommodation of the difficulties of the two sections, North and South, and that there would be no disunion¹⁹. After the First Manassas, however, it was seen that the struggle would be a long one. Only four students offered themselves for matriculation in the University in the fall of 1861; as a result, all of the faculty resigned. The War went on apace, and the University did not reopen until the fall of 1865. Moore, like Boynton, Whitehorne, and Barnard, removed to the North; he became chaplain of the Sixth Pennsylvania heavy artillery²⁰.

At the close of the War, attracted by the law, Moore studied with his old friend, Senator Cowan, at Greensburg, Pa. (where Moore had been pastor fifteen years before) and at Pittsburgh; and was admitted to the bar of Allegheny County in 1866. For two years Moore was U.S. District Attorney for the Western District of Pennsylvania.

In 1868 he went into private practice of the law at Allegheny City and Pittsburgh. He was for some time senior member of the legal firm of Moore & McGirr; in his later years he was associated with John M. Rourke in the practice of law. His practice was largely in the field of criminal law. "He was one of the most eloquent orators at the bar, and for a long time figured in the most sensational and important cases tried in the Allegheny County courts. His especial forte was medical jurisprudence; in murder trials where poison had been used he displayed great learning and ability . . . Mr. Moore was a brilliant and versatile man, widely read in many branches of learning; he would

¹⁷E. W. Hilgard, "A historical account of the Geological & Agricultural Survey of the State of Mississippi" (*Publ. Miss. Hist. Society*, 3, 1900, 207-34.) See, esp. pp. 222-24.

¹⁸E. W. Hilgard, *Report on the Geology and Agriculture of the State of Mississippi*, 1860, xii-xiii, 290-91.

¹⁹Note 8, *supra*; see, esp., p. 115.

²⁰E. C. Scott, in his *Ministerial Directory . . .*, 1942, p. 514, states that Moore was a professor in the Port Gibson (Miss.) Female College between 1861 and 1865; but this I believe to be an error.

have been eminent had he given his entire attention to any of the professions to which he had at times devoted his attention²¹." Thus it will be seen that his early-awakened scientific interests pursued him to the end.

He spent his declining years in Allegheny City; the last year of his life (he died at the age of seventy-two) he was confined to his room because of illnesses associated with age. Death was probably hastened by a fall received some weeks before his death, which occurred on November 2, 1896.

²¹Obituary of William D. Moore, in the *Pittsburgh Commercial Gazette*, Nov. 3, 1896.