Edwin Markham and the Restoration Movement

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Recently, I have been reading L. C. Sears' delightful autobiography entitled *What Is Your Life?* In recalling his graduation from the University of Kansas in 1921, Dr. Sears mentions that Edwin Markham, "The Dean of American Poets," was the commencement speaker on that occasion.

Edwin Markham (1852-1940), the author of "The Man With The Hoe," was called "the most talked-of literary man in America" by *The Saturday Evening Post* and "America's greatest poet" by *The New York Globe*. It was the opinion of *The San Francisco Chronicle* that "No other poem in the world ever attracted so much attention as Edwin Markham's 'The Gospel of Jesus' with which I memorized most of the Gospels as I tended sheep like young David of old. I could repeat a hundred pages from memory as a child, pages of the Gospel of Jesus that I memorized while tending my mother's sheep. The Gospel of Jesus is the one thing that has had the most profound influence in my life."

The person who exerted the strongest spiritual influence on young Charley Markham was his mother. She was an active member of the Church of Christ in Vacaville, and she quickly introduced this way of life to her young son. As Markham later remembered:

She was a seeker after religious truth always and took me with her, even as a mere child, on these religious quests. She belonged to the Campbellite Church, known now as the Disciples. There was just enough controversy and clash of wits in that early church to satisfy her keen and vivid intelligence. In those days the Disciples specialized in Bible lore, and what was not known to them of immersion as the true form of baptism was not known to any group on earth.

I remember that now and then my mother would dress me and take me to the room of the Bible Expositor. In the room were the Sunday School teachers to have the new lesson. My mother would have me read different parts of the Bible to the other pupils. I had a good memory for Bible quotations and always ended his sermons with a terrific appeal to the terrors of the law.

Another observer wrote:

"Johnston was a man of fine appearance well educated, and a fine preacher. In fact, along the lines of "first principles" he had few equals. He was a college-bred man, and at once took a leading place in the educational forces of the State among our people."

Johnston was making plans to launch a school in Santa Rosa in the fall of 1872 to be known as Christian College. Ever since Charley Markham's baptism, his mother had entertained thoughts of her son studying for the ministry, and now she urged him to enroll under Johnston's tutelage at Christian College.

Such was Alexander Johnston's rallying ability that he succeeded in gaining support for his enterprise. A splendid two-story frame building with all the necessary equipment was completed at a cost of twenty-five thousand dollars. On September 23, 1872, the doors of Christian College were opened to the public.

Charley Markham was a student at Christian College in the school years of 1872-1873. He was graduated in 1874, the twenty-three year old graduate went forth as a teacher. In future years, the young man who almost became a preacher in the Church of Christ went on to establish an international reputation as "the Dean of American poetry."

Markham's intimate involvement with the Restoration Movement came to an end with his graduation from Christian College, but he never outgrew the influence of the years he spent there. When he was eighty years old he told a friend about the church of his youth:

This church claimed to have no catechism and no creed. They claimed that their only creed was the Bible, and that any one could be received into the church who acknowledged Christ as Savior. I did that! He must also express a desire to live in conformity with Christ's teaching, I made that pledge, and have lived up to it, since that day.

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