INTERVIEW WITH DR. JAMES MILLIGAN  
BY DR. R. FRANKLIN THOMPSON  

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Wesley Gardens, Washington  

T: I am now talking with Jim Milligan at Wesley Gardens on the 28th of February, 1978. He tells me he was born in Iowa a few miles from Des Moines in 1881. You were minister in Salem at FirSt Church, that beautiful church with the tall spire. You were one of the ones who opened the doors for me for the Methodist association in the Pacific Northwest. 

M: I went to Salem from Corvallis. Bishop Low came to me and said Corvallis has been choosing their own preachers with not the best results for them and they have asked me, knowing their finances and knowing their church, to send a man who can do the job. He said, "Now, Jim, you go down there and do that job."  

T: I am sure you had a wonderful time because Oregon State College is there. Do you remember Dr. Vance who was in your church at Corvallis? He was a biologist at Oregon State. That was probably after your time. When you came to the College of Puget Sound, it must have been before 1913 because it was before Dr. Todd. Do you remember who was President—was Benbow or Thoburn President?  

M: Oh, no, he was President quite a while after that. The College was on the corner of 9th and G Street in the building that had been a dwelling—a big house. It was about two or three blocks from the First Methodist Church. I took most of my high school work at the College.  

T: The Academy it was.  

M: Yes, the Academy. I took six years of Latin, four years of Greek.  

T: Did you take Greek under Dean Marsh?
M: No, no. I took Greek under a New Englander, a real Yankee, who in the class would say, "You will find the rule for that on page so and so, article so and so," without looking. I sat in the Latin class a number of times when the girl put her hand on the back of my chair and it trembled.

T: She was afraid she was going to get called on?

M: Well, yes. The Professor (I'll remember his name by and by) was a good teacher. He was outstanding.

T: Did you start right in to become a preacher—did you determine you were going to enter the ministry right then, in your early days in college?

M: No. I was licensed to preach in Idaho Falls, Idaho, by the father of one of fellows here, N. M. Temple. He told me I should go to college.

T: Did you take the Conference course of study or did you go to Kimball?

M: I took the Conference course of study when I began to think about going to Seminary. The Bishop in charge at that time told the District Superintendent not to let me go—said he has read all the books.

T: I remember I had a District Superintendent that told me that once, too, and that was sort of a characteristic of some of those early district superintendents. Mine told me that you would go and write a bunch a papers and then you will come back and read them to your congregation and not be worth anything all your life.

M: When I was a district superintendent, Baxter was Bishop, and Baxter had died, and they sent McConnell and I was taking him someplace one day and he said,

Milligan, you have been district superintendent for four years and
I know no reason why you shouldn't finish the other two, but if there is any
ccharge in the whole area that you would like to have, I can give it to you."
That has a tendency to take away inferiority complex!
T: It certainly does. Were you ever on the campus at 6th and Sprague?
M: Yes.
T: Did they move from the one you mentioned a moment ago to 6th and Sprague
while you were a student?
M: Yes. From the building on 9th and G Street, they went for awhile to another
building up on Yakima, as I remember, I'm not sure.
T: Yes, it was Yakima. It is still an apartment house there.
M: Well, then they moved to 6th and Sprague. The preacher who asked me to
preach made me believe that I could work my way through school.
T: They had classrooms, they had a music conservatory in a little tiny building,
then they also had gymnasiuums, didn't they, at 6th and Sprague?
M: ---
T: Do you remember a student by the name of Jasper Noyes?
M: I certainly do. He was a local preacher.
T: He was sort of different, wasn't he?
M: Yes, he was...
T: He told me one time that he kept the school alive by running the dormitories and
taking the money from the income from the dormitories and paying the professors.
Did you ever hear that?
M: No.
T: I think it was pure imagination, after years and years of trying to remember.
M: Is he still living?

T: No, he died about seven or eight years ago. He lived by himself in Sumner, but he often mentioned you because I think he looked up to you as the Beau Brummell of the campus! He'd say, "That red-haired Jim Milligan--all the girls just flocked around him because he was so popular."

M: That wasn't so. The girls never flocked around me.

T: Do you remember some unusual professors you had?

M: Theo Boyer.

T: He was president at one time, wasn't he?

M: Not while I was there. He was a teacher. He worked his way through college by sawing cord wood by hand. He was sort of idolized by the students, all of them, including me.

T: Do you remember what he taught?

M: No, I don't remember what he taught. I just remember that he was an outstanding, upright, thorough Christian.

T: What other professor do you remember?

M: The dean.

T: That wasn't Marsh?

M: No, Marsh was in my class.

T: Oh, is that right.

M: Marsh didn't know anymore than I did. He was in my class and there was nothing particularly unusual about Marsh. We had a man there from Australia, Bert Love and one day, in the last year of our class, the year we were to graduate, Bert came to me with tears in his eyes and said he couldn't finish school. I said,
"Why?" (I always like to know the reason.) He said he had run out of money and
he didn't know how to get anymore. I said, "Bert, how much money would it take
for you to finish school?" He told me--it was a little over $100 he was lacking to
finish school. I said to him, "Bert, I came into possession of a little money--a little
more than that recently and I am willing to loan it to you so you can get through
school." He nearly wrung my hand off. He took the money, he graduated, got
married later and named one of his children after my wife, paid it all back--it was
the first thing he paid back after he graduated.

T: Do you remember, Jim, the meeting of the Puget Sound Conference where they
talked about whether or not they would continue the school?

M: I certainly do, and you know I do.

T: I know you do and I'd like to know more about it, Jim.

M: Did you know a student by the name of Geoghegan?

T: Yes.

M: The preachers had a Conference and Geoghegan, afterwards, wrote a letter
and gave it to the President and I'm not sure who the President was, but whoever
it was sent the letter to me.

T: This is the letter right here.

M: That's the letter.

T: Tell me about the Conference session. There had been a real debate about
whether they could continue the school, wasn't that right?

M: As I remember, it wasn't too much of a debate about whether they could continue
the school--it was mostly talk about how to do it. They weren't figuring on growing
any more.
T: It was money pure and simple, wasn't it.

M: It was finances. That Dean was Dean Palmer. They had some difficulty to get finances and they some difficulty in getting the kind of professors that they wanted. One session they failed to nominate Dean Palmer, who taught Latin and Greek.

T: You mean the Conference didn't nominate him or the school?

M: The preachers, that is the Trustees. The Trustees didn't nominate him. He came to class and he stood up to the young men and women in that class the next day after they failed to nominate him, and with tears in his eyes, barely able to keep from bawling, and informed the class that he had not been elected. He had a hickory pointer, about as long as this, much more slender than that, and he said, "This pointer which has taught boys and girls for fifty years shall teach them no more," and he broke the end of it off. It would be overdrawing to say that he broke the students hearts but I wouldn't be overdrawing to say that the students had tears in their eyes.

T: This Conference session was in 1913, wasn't it, when they had the big debate about whether to continue the school or not.

M: I don't know.

T: In this letter from John M. Geoghegan, Class of 1921, (that would be after your time, wouldn't it?)

M: Yes.

T: He says: "There are few alive today who remember the tense session of the Puget Sound Conference when the continued existence of the University of Puget Sound was threatened. As I recall, it was the Conference of 1913. A resolution
had been presented to that body which called for the University's dissolution.

It had strong supporters among the reverend brethren and they seemed to have all the logic on their side to discontinue the University. The institution was in bad financial straits and there appeared to be no way out. Furthermore, Willamette University and Kimball School of Theology were not so very far away and they were fine, growing Methodist institutions. Again, a few miles away was a very fine University of Washington. The question was raised why the University of Puget Sound should try to compete with such well established institutions of higher learning... The supporters of the resolution to stop the University's existence fell into three categories: There were transfers from other conferences who had not too much sympathy for the conference problems. Many of them occupied the better pulpits and after a few years would expect to transfer out to even better spots. There were those who were stationed in the economically poor pastorates and they had to carry the heavy financial burdens and live on pitiful low salaries. And then there was a group sometimes referred to as the holiness crowd. Most of these, not too educated themselves although thoroughly sincere and devoted men, had a deep distrust of college education. The Darwinism bogey frightened them and they had strong suspicions that the theory was being expounded favourably on the campus. In the debate all these viewpoints were represented and diverse groups were somehow joined together in one great assault upon the unfortunate institution. To the friends of the University it looked like a lost cause.

"There were friends, however, valiant ones. They fought a good fight and they won, but no chaplet has ever been dedicated to their memory. Among these
were Ed Randall, a former President of the University, and two of the Alumni, Francis LaViolette and Jim Milligan. In his argument for the retention of the institution, Randall was coldly logical but he did not seem to impress the Conference. LaViolette was emotional but the Conference brushed that off. Frank was ever so. Then came Milligan to close the debate. He was practically an unknown. He had a small pastorate with little or no status. He had never before taken a part in Conference debates. He was no Conference politician. His speech was passionate. Tears ran down his cheeks as he pleaded for his beloved Alma Mater. Where Randall and LaViolette had failed, he succeeded in reaching the conscience of the Conference. It wasn't his oratory, for he was far from being an accomplished speaker (at that time). As a matter of fact, he himself was so overwhelmed he was almost inarticulate. But there flowed out from him that morning a stream of passionate devotion for the institution that he provided him with an education and made it possible for him to enter the Ministry.

"Exhausted and almost broken, Jim resumed his seat. The Bishop called for the vote and the resolution was soundly defeated."

Do you remember that? Tell me about it. Did it happen like it says in the letter?

M: It was just as it says.

T: In one place, it says you were tall, red-haired. Did you have red hair then?

M: Yes.

T: Did you prepare that speech ahead of time?

M: I thought about it ahead of time. I couldn't say that it was what I would call
now "prepared" but I thought about it and I had read in Daniel Webster's first case. Daniel Webster had a brother Zeke and Zeke set a trap and caught a wild animal, I think it was a beaver. He was going to kill it and Daniel asked him not to. The boys got into a fracas and they went before their father and Daniel presented his side of the case and his father sat there listening to them. Before Daniel got through, he said, "Look at that quivering, little innocent animal. See if you dare take away the life that you can't give back again." Somehow I remembered those words, and I always remember the passion of Daniel Webster in behalf of that little animal. Before Daniel was through, his father said, "Zeke, Zeke, you let that woodchuck go."

T: That was an example for you all through the years and you used that same logic before the Conference, I take it.

M: Well, I was remembering Daniel Webster's first case and I thought, well, this is my first case.

T: Do you remember if the vote was close?

M: I think it was unanimous.

T: Did the men gather around you and congratulate you?

M: No, not that I remember. If they did, I guess I have forgotten.

T: You really saved the University, you know.

M: I've been under the conviction that I saved the University.

T: I am sure that is true and it must give you a tremendous sense of warmth in the heart.

M: You see, I am 96 years old and I haven't any least complaint against the church,
against the bishops, against the superintendents. Father said he was sorry he
couldn't send me to the University, he didn't have money to do that.

T: But he could let you go.

M: He could let me go, but the preacher made me believe I could.

T: When you drive by once in awhile, you just take a look at the University and
just think that you were the one that saved in 1913.

M: I have done that, but I haven't told many people.

T: That is one reason why, in the 35 years I have been associated with the University,
I have tried to maintain the Methodist connection, because the Methodist ministers,
like yourself, saved it and their sacrificial giving/what made it possible for it to
continue and grow. And it is just men like yourself, Jim, that made it.

M: As I remember, when the vote was taken, it was like there hadn't been any
opposition.

T: As he said, Randall and LaViolette were good . . .

M: I remember one sentence of what I said, "There are those who love her . . ."

T: You remember Daniel Webster when the Dartmouth case came up, he said,
"It's a small school but there are those who love her."

Do you remember LaViolette?

M: Very well.

T: He was Fred Pedersen's wife's father. He was Ethel Pederson's father.

Tell me about LaViolette. He was a minister in the Conference at that time, wasn't
he?

M: Yes, he was. I passed First Church for a year or two and attended LaViolette's
church. He was a good preacher.

T: What church did he have then?

M: Fowler Church.

T: That was a church named for Bishop Fowler, wasn't it?

M: I think so.

T: Where was it located?

M: Over on the east side of Tacoma. There was a road that ran through north and south and it went up sort of a hill and here was sort of a hollow and the church was in that hollow.

T: Was LaViolette one of the Conference leaders?

M: Yes. He was one of my leaders.

T: As I said, he was Fred Pedersen's wife's father. You may remember her. She died about five years ago. Do you remember this Mr. Randall he refers to?

M: Randall was a President, wasn't he?

T: Was he President while you were there?

M: I don't remember whether he was President then or not, but I remember Randall very well.

T: What kind of a man was he?

M: He was, what I thought, a first-class Methodist preacher at the time.

T: You were talking about the bishops a few minutes ago. You must have served under a good many bishops, didn't you?

M: Not many.

T: You served under Baxter, didn't you?
M: Yes.

T: Who was before Baxter? Was it Bishop Lowe?

M: I think so.

T: After Baxter came . . .

M: McConnell.

T: He was only here as an interim bishop for about a year.

M: Yes, I know. But I had read some of his books and I read about his mother and he liked that and he was one of my pet people. When he became bishop and he talked to me like that, I was like a little child . . .

(End of tape)

R. Franklin Thompson
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