

PROCEEDINGS
OF THE
AMERICAN PHILOSOPHICAL SOCIETY.

VOL. VII. JANUARY—JUNE, 1860. No. 63.

Stated Meeting, January 6, 1860.

Present, fifteen members.

Dr. WOOD, President, in the Chair.

Letters were received from the Elliott Society of Natural History, Charleston, S. C., dated December 15, 1859, acknowledging the receipt of the Proceedings; from the Corporation of Harvard College, dated Cambridge, December 17, 1859, and from the State Historical Society of Wisconsin, dated Madison, December 20, 1859, acknowledging the receipt of the last No. of the Transactions.

Letters were also received from the Dublin University Zoological and Botanical Association, dated Trinity College, Dublin, and from the R. Saxon Society of Sciences, dated Leipsig, August 23 and September 3, 1859, and from the R. Geographical Society, dated London, September 9, 1859, acknowledging donations for the Library.

The following donations for the Library were received:—

Trans. Zool. Soc. London, iv, parts 5, 6. 4to.—*From the Society.*

Proceedings, Nos. 339*, 347*, 384*, 392*.—*From the same.*

Mem. R. Astron. Soc., xxvii. 4to.—*From the Society.*

Monthly Notices, xviii complete, and xx, No. 1.—*From the same.*

Journ. R. Geog. Soc., xxviii. 8vo.—*From the Society.*

Proc. Royal Society, x, Nos. 35, 36.—*From the Society.*

Report (xxviii) British Association. Leeds, 1858.—*From the Ass.*

and Stat. Soc., March 22, 30 pp. 8vo., with Map, New York, 1860.—*From W. P. Foulke.*

PAULDING (J. K.)—Prof. Trego announced the death of a member of the Society, the Honorable James K. Paulding, April 4th, 1860, aged 81.

Dr. Emerson called the attention of the Society to a fact in optics, which seems to have been but little noticed. A very simple experiment illustrating the combined action of the mental and optical faculties concerned in vision. A person standing before a mirror, holding a picture before him, with its face also towards the mirror, will find the reflection of the hands or right and left sides of a picture reversed, the right hand appearing the left and the left the right. But this reversion does not extend to the person holding the picture, or others by his side, whose right and left sides are recognized only as right and left. This illustrates the effects of education of the eye, which having recognized through repeated observations the true relations of the two sides and hands, admits without hesitation the mental evidence, but refuses to accept any but optical evidence from the flat surface of the picture.

Dr. Leyburn, pursuant to appointment, read the following obituary notice of the Rev. J. Addison Alexander, a deceased member of the Society.

OBITUARY NOTICE OF JOSEPH ADDISON ALEXANDER, D.D.

BY JOHN LEYBURN, D.D.

Joseph Addison Alexander, was the third son of the late Archibald Alexander, D.D., of Princeton, N. J., and was born in the city of Philadelphia, April 24th, 1809. On his maternal side he was the grandson of James Waddell, the celebrated blind preacher of Virginia, immortalized by Wirt in the *British Spy*. His father having removed from Philadelphia to Princeton, young Alexander became a student of the College of New Jersey, where he graduated in 1826, with valedictorian honors, a great achievement for a youth of seven-

teen. He then became an associate of the principal of the Edgehill School at Princeton, where he remained until 1830, when, at the early age of twenty-one, he was chosen adjunct professor of languages in the College. Here he remained till 1833, when he resigned his post, which he had filled with signal success, and sailed for Europe, where he spent a year in prosecuting his studies, chiefly at Halle and Berlin. On his return home he completed his theological course, as he had begun it, with his eminent father. In the year 1838 he was licensed to preach the Gospel, and in 1839 was ordained to the full work of the ministry. But several years before his licensure, he began to assist in the instructions of the Theological Seminary at Princeton, and in 1839 was elected Professor of Oriental and Biblical Literature in that institution, by the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church. In 1851 he was transferred by the Assembly to the department of Biblical and Ecclesiastical History; and by the Assembly of 1859, his professorship was entitled that of Hellenistic and New Testament Literature. It was while occupying this post that death found him, and closed his mortal career.

This cursory enumeration of the official positions which he filled with eminent, and without exaggeration it may be said, unparalleled ability, though indicative of the high estimation in which he was held, gives, however, a wholly inadequate idea of a man who, beyond all question, was one of the most extraordinary this country has ever produced. From his childhood he exhibited a remarkable precocity. He scarcely needed schools or teachers, such was his passion for knowledge. His facility in the acquisition of languages seemed almost to approach intuition. When but a boy of twelve years, finding an Arabic grammar in his father's library, he commenced studying it, and at fourteen had so mastered the language that he read the Koran through in the original,—a linguistic feat in all probability which has no parallel. From Arabic he turned his attention to Persiac, after which he acquired Hebrew, Syriac, and Chaldee, and this before he had fairly reached the age of manhood. Later he familiarized himself with Sanscrit. As for Greek and Latin, they were almost

vernacular to him. Of the modern languages he had mastered French, German, Italian, Spanish, Dutch, Danish, and Coptic, and how many others, is not certainly known; but after having got so many, a new acquisition of a cognate tongue was to him a matter of a few weeks or days. One who knew him as well perhaps as any living person, informs the writer of this that, as a matter of literary recreation, Mr. Alexander was every year exploring some new field in this department of learning, and that it would be "easier to enumerate the languages he had *not* studied, than those with which he was familiar."

But, as his eminent colleague the Rev. Dr. Hodge says of him, notwithstanding these wonderful attainments, "his power of acquiring languages was the very smallest of his gifts." His intellectual power was as general as it was great. He was great in everything he understood, and great in all his faculties. "The greatest man," says Dr. Hodge, "whom I have ever known; all whose powers and attainments were consecrated to the cause of truth and of Christ." A high compliment, truly, coming as it does from one who himself occupies the front rank amongst the scholars of the age.

As an author he is best known by his elaborate commentaries on various portions of the Scriptures, which readily gained for him a high reputation among the learned of the Old World, as well as of the New. He was a profound biblical critic. The vast stores of Germany in this department were perfectly at his command, as well as every other repository of the labors of his predecessors or contemporaries. Indeed, the only exception we have ever heard mentioned to his commentaries, is that they are too learned,—that there is an exuberance which amounts to prodigality. His store of antiquarian, historic, and biblical knowledge, was wonderful.

What was a most valuable accompaniment of his passion for acquisition in the fields of learning, was his remarkable memory. The tenacity of this faculty with him, too, extended to everything,—not merely to leading ideas or historical facts, but to words and names,—and that even where there seemed to be no special call for its exercise. As an instance

in point, one of his colleagues mentions that, at the beginning of the seminary term, when forty or fifty new students have usually matriculated, and without regard to the order of their names, it has not unfrequently happened that the next day, when the names of these students would be needed, he would take his pen and write down the entire list in the order of their matriculation, giving even the middle letter in each name, and the classes they were to enter, purely from memory.

His investigations were always thorough and exhausting. Every topic was examined with minuteness, even to such remote circumstances as would escape ordinary minds. In communicating his knowledge, too, he was in like manner remarkable. His command of language has seldom been surpassed. He always seemed to have at his tongue's end the most appropriate words to express his ideas, and it was a pleasure to sit and listen even to the cadence and flow of his copious vocabulary.

As a writer of "facetiae," he possessed a wonderful power. The Philadelphia Monthly Magazine, edited in 1827-8, by Dr. J. C. Snowden, and published by Dobson, contains many of his earlier pieces, and the Princeton Magazine is full of them. His perception of the ludicrous was acutely instinctive, and his wit and humor choice and exhaustless. As a reviewer he was well known as occupying the very front rank. The Biblical Repertory and Princeton Review, was indebted to him for a large portion of its most attractive and telling articles. These he produced apparently without effort. With the greatest ease he could "steer from grave to gay," now writing a playful slashing criticism upon some unfortunate author, and now dealing with some ponderous question of philology. Some of these articles are among the most brilliant and scathing in the whole range of periodical literature.

Of his poetical talent the public knew less than of any other. What he published was anonymous, and when a piece would occasionally be traced to him, as in the case of "The Doomed Man," it seemed to annoy him.

To Dr. Alexander's powers as a preacher, thousands can

bear witness. When occupying one of the Philadelphia pulpits for a year or more, he drew crowds, which filled not only the church but the vestibule. In his manner there was nothing of what are considered the graces of oratory. He usually read his sermons closely, without action, and in a rapid monotonous tone; but the copiousness of thought, the affluence of language, and the richness and vividness of his imagination, charmed every one. It was as if one were listening to a Macaulay, discoursing from the pulpit on the sublimest of themes.

Almost the entire life of Dr. Alexander was occupied in study. He was a recluse in his habits, and characterized by remarkable diffidence. This latter quality made him shrink from society, and left the impression very generally that he was deficient in the social element. But those who had access to him in private, well know that there was no more genial companion. He was full of the most entertaining conversation, and much as he kept himself aloof from the world, seemed always thoroughly familiar with current events, and with the actors in them.

In his method of writing he was at times almost whimsical, or at any rate altogether unique. He seemed to weary with following any one form in preparing his manuscripts, and would write on sheets of paper of various shapes and dimensions, and with the lines taking every conceivable direction. I remember once to have seen specimens of his manuscripts, which had the lines running around the large sheet, so as to form a complete circle.

In these cursory statements we are aware that but a most inadequate view has been given of this extraordinary man. Volumes rather than a short obituary paper, would be required to portray, in anything like their amplitude and proper proportions, his gifts and attainments. His death at the age of little over fifty, when only yet in the midst of his prime, is a loss to American learning, and especially to biblical literature, which can with difficulty, if ever, be supplied. His sedentary habits undoubtedly undermined his constitution and shortened his life. For the last two or three years he had lost his former

full and almost plethoric appearance, and had begun to wear the aspect of premature old age. Some months before his death, he was attacked with bleeding at his lungs; this, however, was but one of the effects of another disease, which had been for some time prostrating and wearing down his health. The real destroyer of his life was that exhausting and terrible complaint, *diabetes*. From this he had suffered, unknown even to his friends. His end at last came, with but little indication that it was just at hand, and in a few hours after an attack which rendered him insensible he breathed his last. But to him the event was evidently not unanticipated. His mind had been more than usually engaged in devotion, and it is worthy of remark, as illustrative of the simplicity of his piety, that he occupied himself during much of his time after he was disabled from severe study, in committing hymns to memory. But instead of chanting in Greek the ancient hymn of Clemens Alexandrinus, or some other such time-honored lyric, which a scholar like himself might have been supposed to prefer, his favorite hymn was that so often sung in the prayer-meetings of the humblest Christians :

“ Just as I am, without one plea,
But that thy blood was shed for me,” &c.

His splendid intellect and his vast resources were all brought into subjection to his Christian faith. He had no fellowship with that pride of learning which exalts itself even above the revelations of Divine wisdom. He was as lowly in his estimation of himself, as he was exalted in the opinions of his fellow-men, and especially did he regard himself as incompetent to sit in judgment upon his Maker, and decide, as too many attempt to do, what he should and what he should not have revealed.

On the 28th of January, 1860, Joseph Addison Alexander died, and was laid beside his eminent father and brother, and a galaxy of the illustrious dead, in the graveyard at Princeton.

Pending nomination, No. 397 was read.

Mr. Foulke, on behalf of the Committee on the Library,