

REV. WILLIAM S. WHITE, D. D.,

AND HIS TIMES.

[1800—1873.]

An Autobiography.

EDITED BY HIS SON,

REV. H. M. WHITE, D. D.,

PASTOR OF THE LOUDOUN-STREET PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, WINCHESTER, VIRGINIA.

RICHMOND, VA.:

PRESBYTERIAN COMMITTEE OF PUBLICATION.

1891.

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JAMES K. HAZEN, *Secretary of Publication.*

PRINTED BY
WHITTET & SHEPPERSON,
RICHMOND VA.

ELECTROTYPED BY
L. LEWIS,
RICHMOND, VA.

spoken at such a juncture, have renewed in my mind the thought, how precious, how heaven-like, how immortal are Christian friendships!

“‘The fellowship of kindred minds,
Is like to that above.’

“Then, asking me to lead in prayer by his bed-side, he said, ‘Brother L——, I am getting near; but I am peaceful—I am peaceful.’ And then he added, seeming to me particularly to wish to utter this testimony: ‘I have spent forty-two years in the gospel ministry; I have no regrets for that; I am thankful that I have spent so much of my life in that work.’

“Making the prayer as he had requested, when I rose from it I saw that he seemed still for a few moments engaged in silent devotion, with his arms resting on the elbows upon his breast, and his hands stretching upwards. Then turning to me, he repeated his testimony, I think as to his peace of mind in the prospect of the great change (and he needed not to tell me on what that rested), as well as in respect to his ministry.

“I expected and wished to see him again, for the chamber where such a servant of God meets his end is a privileged place; it is a vestibule of heaven; we may obtain more than we confer in the visit to the departing one. But it so happened that I did not get there again; it was therefore my last earthly interview with him. . . .

“WINCHESTER, VA., *December*, 1873.

G. W. L.”

[*From the New York Observer.*]

“LETTER FROM DR. PLUMER TO LEVI A. WARD, ESQ., OF ROCHESTER, N. Y.

“MY DEAR, KIND FRIEND: You will remember that blessed meeting of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in your city in 1860. I can never forget it. At its opening DR. Spring offered one of the most copious and edi-

fyng prayers I have ever heard. Although it was twice as long as the prayers we commonly hear before sermon, yet all were sorry when he ceased to plead at the mercy-seat.

“The prayer was followed by a very practical and powerful discourse from Rev. Dr. Wm. A. Scott, of California. The preacher had just crossed the Rocky Mountains by the ‘pony express.’ For eleven days and nights he had travelled continuously, not knowing, for a considerable part of the way, what moment the Indians, then hostile and excited, might make a murderous attack on the party. But God spared his useful life, and he preached to us with simplicity and power.

‘The Assembly thus opened was remarkable for many things. It was large. It did much important business. The hospitality shown by you and your neighbors was boundless. An excellent temper governed the Assembly. There was an abundance of good preaching. It was the last Assembly that invited any Southern man to fill any high post in the North. It was the last Assembly in which the South was represented. . . . But a chief object in writing to you is to say something of the last days of the Rev. Dr. Wm. S. White, who recently died at Lexington, Va., honored and beloved in all the land.

“You will remember him as somewhat lame. Your considerate Committee of Arrangements kindly placed him at a fine hotel hard by the church. Here he was handsomely entertained. Out of the Assembly and in waking hours he was almost constantly surrounded by a pleasant group of gentlemen, most of whom had never seen him before. They were attracted by his manly and noble countenance, by his easy, courteous and affable manners, by his marked humility, and by his ardent love to Christ and his people. Often have they spoken of the love and admiration he drew forth by his winning ways.

“At his death Dr. White was seventy-three years old. He had been a preacher forty-eight years. In his life he had

done a great work for the Tract Society. He had, at different times, controlled two very important female schools. He had been chaplain at the University of Virginia. He had had charge of four different churches. He delighted in pastoral work. His pulpit was his throne. His people were his joy and crown. I think you would like to hear something of the last days of this great and good man.

“About eight years ago Dr. White’s throat or lungs became somewhat affected. He suffered more or less till near the close of his life, when a bad cold aggravated all his symptoms. He lived a few weeks and then was no longer on earth. To him death had no terrors. It was the highway to the joy of his Lord. For some months before his decease Dr. White had confidently anticipated a very early departure out of time into eternity. Yet he was always happy to see his friends, particularly his brethren in the ministry. Thinking and talking of death did not distress him. He spoke of leaving the world with as much composure as if he were going on a visit to one of his children. He said he had lived his allotted time on earth. Except for the sundering of ties very tender and strong, the prospect of dying did not cost him a pang. He would have greatly rejoiced to be allowed to preach the blessed gospel, but he never murmured at the silence enforced upon him by disease. He said, ‘I have been greatly honored in being allowed, in my poor way, to preach the glorious gospel, and now my Master, who called me first to preach, wills me to sit still and be silent; and I will try and obey him in a proper and becoming manner, as a Christian ought, with patience and resignation to his holy will. If I know my own heart, I desire to glorify God in sickness and in health.’

“The old adversary, the lion of the evening, would not let this old hero of the cross pass away without annoyance. He sometimes disturbed him with fears that he would yet be left to fall into some sin that would greatly dishonor

God. Again he suggested that his sins were too great for God to forgive. But these conflicts were short. The truths, 'My grace is sufficient for thee,' and 'He is able to save to the uttermost,' were blessed to drive away the arch enemy.

"Dr. White's interest in the church of Christ grew stronger and stronger to the end. He delighted in hearing of any progress the gospel was making in any part of the world. He took great interest in the proceedings of the Evangelical Alliance. As his vision was good (he had second sight), he read with great pleasure everything he could get on the subject. He said he thought it augured well for the church of Christ. He loved God's people of every name. The hymns beginning—

" 'I lay my sins on Jesus,
The spotless Lamb of God,'

and—

" 'Jesus, lover of my soul,
Let me to thy bosom fly,'

were as soothing cordials to him.

"With the exceptions already stated, Dr. White's peace was like a river. It was the peace of God that passeth all understanding. Lying very still for a while, one heard him say, 'I want to go home.' Supposing his mind might be wandering, one said, 'You are at home.' He replied, 'Oh! yes, I am at my earthly home, but I want to go to my heavenly home, to be with Jesus. Here I have a good, sweet home, with my dear wife and children, and it will be a great trial to part with you all. But I want to go to my heavenly home. I have two precious sons gone before. Will not they rejoice to welcome their old father to glory? And will it not be joyful to see my blessed Saviour and Redeemer in his glory and dwell with him for ever?'

"To the wife of his youth he said, 'Look up to God, my

dear one. Jehovah will be your Husband, your Father and your Friend. It will not be long before you follow me.'

"He knew his Saviour as long as he knew anything. His full and final release was apparently without pain. He fell asleep in Jesus.

"Thus there has left us as true, as generous, as candid, as faithful, and as loving a man as you will find in a lifetime.

"My love to all around you.

"Faithfully yours, W. M. S. PLUMER."

[From the *New York Observer*.]

"THE LATE WILLIAM S. WHITE, D. D.

"MESSRS. EDITORS: The recent tribute of Dr. Plumer to his old friend, Dr. White, in the *Observer* touches the heart of another friend in the North.

"Nearly forty years ago it was the privilege of the writer to be Dr. White's assistant, and then his successor, in the general agency of the Virginia Tract Society, just entering upon the 'volume enterprise' of the American Tract Society, inaugurated after a noble speech made by Dr. Plumer before them at their anniversary, May, 1834. His fellow-worker begs leave to bear his attestation to what the distinguished professor has so well and so justly said of one of the most true, devout, and earnest servants of Christ in Virginia during the last forty years, and to drop this simple immortelle on the grave of the honored and beloved pastor and friend of his youthful ministry. S. B. S. B."

The Rev. Dr. J. L. Kirkpatrick, Professor of Philosophy in Washington and Lee University, wrote of him to *The Central Presbyterian*, viz.:

¹ This is Dr. Bissell, now of New York city, who assisted Dr. White in his early manhood in the American Tract Agency in Virginia.