

WASHINGTON AND LEE UNIVERSITY

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HISTORICAL PAPERS

No. 3.—1892

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PREFACE.

This number contains the valuable address of Col. Bolivar Christian on "The Scotch-Irish Settlers in the Valley of Virginia," now nearly out of print; Notes on Washington Academy and Washington College, by the Hon. Sidney S. Baxter; Memorial Tributes to the Rev. George A. Baxter, D. D.; and a continuation of Sketches of Trustees.

In preparing these Sketches we have been greatly aided by the Rev. William Brown, D. D., Mrs. S. C. P. Miller, Judge William P. Houston, and William H. Ruffner, LL. D. These will be continued in succeeding numbers.

We hope to publish in the next number a continuation of Dr. Ruffner's history of the institution by his son Dr. William Henry Ruffner.

WILLIAM McLAUGHLIN,
WILLIAM A. GLASGOW,
HENRY ALEXANDER WHITE,

Committee.

WASHINGTON AND LEE UNIVERSITY,
February, 1892.

MEMORIAL TRIBUTES TO THE REV. GEORGE A. BAXTER, D. D.

The following notices of Dr. Baxter appeared after his death.

From the "*Watchman of the South*," supposed to be by the Rev. STUART ROBINSON, D. D.

GEORGE A. BAXTER, D. D.

"The memory of the just is blessed." Affection to the past, and benevolence to the present and future, unite in erecting a monument to departed excellence. It is the peculiar felicity of the good man, that his usefulness does not die with him. His memory remains as a sweet savor behind him, and though dead, he yet speaks—elevating and purifying those of after times. His example stands as a model of generous emulation to the young, and as a source of honest pride to the old.

He therefore has always been a benefactor to his own and after times, who has perpetuated the memory of worth. And Old Mortality, as delineated by the greatest of novelists, was doing the work of a true patriot, as well as an enthusiastic lover of the past, when he bent over the half obliterated records on the tombs of his ancestors, and sought to revive the evidence of their illustrious deeds. And in this good work, whatever is done must be done quickly. The lights which guide us in delineating the characters of the departed are continually and rapidly going out in the darkness of the past.—"Time's effacing fingers" sweep over the traces they have left behind them, and soon those whose records might have afforded an instructive chapter in the great history of man,

may be described in the melancholy language, "*stat magni nominis umbra*"—he stands the shadow of a mighty name. The uncertain babbling of tradition, the dim and indistinct tracery of popular belief, are the only mementos left us.

The name that stands at the head of this article has suggested these reflections. And how strange, how painful, to think of him as one who *was*. But yesterday and I was sitting at his feet—his "bland and noble countenance" shone upon me to cheer the hours of laborious investigation, and his pure and peaceful wisdom directed my footsteps in the way of knowledge. But now he belongs to a departed race, and to the mighty men of old. His sun was eclipsed when it shone with the greatest brightness. In the full maturity of his transcendent talents, and while exercising an incalculable influence for good, his mantle fell from him, and his spirit returned to Him who gave it. The stroke that removed him was unexpected. The last letters that I had received spoke most cheerfully of his improved health. What was my consternation when a friend came into my chamber with the announcement, "Dr. Baxter is dead!" Alas for our Southern Zion, alas for the Church of God! "Help, Lord, for the godly man ceaseth: for the faithful fail from among the children of men." This sentiment was echoed by ten thousand hearts.

Months have now elapsed since his death, and I have confidently expected that some of his associates in usefulness would give the church a delineation of his character. But I have been disappointed. A few short obituary notices are the only tribute to his memory, save that indelible one written in the hearts of his friends, and that which exists in the most important *acts* of our church during its late stormy period. Be mine, then, the voluntary task of gathering those fragments which may be of use in assisting his successors to form an estimate of his unique and admirable character. The delineations will no doubt be coarse, for the hand that gives them is inexperienced, but the hand will be guided by affection and reverence never felt in conjunction for any other man I have ever known.

The necessity for promptness in collecting traits of character in a permanent and tangible form, which exists in all such cases, is peculiarly strong in the present instance. Perhaps no man of his

talents and standing has left fewer writings as monuments of his greatness. He was pre-eminently unambitious. An acquaintance of considerable intimacy for years did not develop a single instance in which he seemed to court the public gaze. He never thrust himself forward. He never took a more prominent stand than circumstances compelled him to assume. But when thus forced into a conspicuous station, his resources were always adequate to the occasion. For such circumstances he was peculiarly fitted, by a quick penetration and comprehensive grasp of mind, which enabled him to meet an unexpected subject as if it had been maturely investigated. He never seemed to be taken unawares. In the confusion of desultory debate, he stood armed at all points, and the weapons of argument, or ridicule, or humor were ever at hand. In the whole course of my pupilage under him, I never knew him to postpone an answer to an objection. The most skilful cavils that could be collected from our own minds or from books never seemed to possess anything of novelty for him, but were met and exploded as old antagonists, the secret of whose weakness was well understood. The whole vast stores of his mind, all that he had read or thought, seemed completely at command. He required no time to parade his arguments or burnish his weapons. And this quickness in the perception of truth gave him a readiness in detecting and exposing fallacy. I have seen arguments proposed to him with an air of triumphant confidence, and then promptly met with a simplicity and clearness which convinced even the objector. And the answer was always accompanied by a kind good humor which robbed defeat of its chagrin.

His memory was singularly retentive. The most minute facts and arguments seemed rooted in his mind. Any one who has conversed with him about books or men must have observed this trait. He once repeated to me a large part of a poem of considerable length, and on being asked when he had read it last, answered, "About forty years ago."

Another distinguishing feature of his character was his imperturbable good humor. The vexations of a lecture room, arising in part from the dulness or indolence of pupils and in part from a self-confident dogmatical spirit that often distinguishes the learner, are well known. But even these could not destroy the serenity of his tem-

per. Though he often sported with a frivolous argument, he was always kind to the objector. Even an impertinent cavil I have seen met by the same meek forbearance. But the writer of these lines has observed him closely in still more trying circumstances—when those whom he esteemed friends opposed and bitterly vilified him for actions which he deemed essential to the welfare of the Church. But even personal unkindness did not move him. With open hand and open heart he still courted a return to amity. For a debater he was perhaps too confiding and credulous. His own open fairness, and his superiority to trick and finesse, led him to expect the same qualities in his antagonist, and he sometimes suffered by his charity. He was an illustration of a passage to be found in a discriminating author. “It has been remarked,” says Abercrombie, “that a turn for acute disputation, and minute and rigid criticism, is often the characteristic of a contracted and prejudiced mind, and that the most enlarged understandings are always the most indulgent to the statements of others—their leading object being to discover truth.”

As a writer, his style was uniform, yet always elevated—a table land, without hills or valleys. It was the opposite of all pomp and parade. He relied for success on the force of truth presented in the clearest light. When he had given a fair view of an argument he did not loiter around it to adorn and beautify it. He left it to produce its own effect, unaided by elegance of diction. Nor did he pause to guard it against every little cavil; he seemed satisfied if it was based on truth; he did not even carry it out into all its legitimate ramifications, but threw it out with an air that seemed to say that it had cost him too little labor to be regarded with much fondness. His eye seemed to be fixed on the thing to be proved, and he hastened to it with an impatience of all delay. He marched boldly on in the highway of argument, nor turned aside to subdue every petty outpost. He never skirmished, he wielded no small arms. But every volley came booming on with the destructive force of heavy ordnance. Every new sentence contained a new idea, every step was an advance towards the goal.

As a preacher he exhibited the same general characteristics. He had too little ornament and too much thought, to be very attractive to the mass of hearers, if they were strangers. For though he

wielded the club of Hercules, it had not a single wreath to adorn it. It often required a cultivated as well as attentive mind to follow the rapid flow of his thoughts; but to such minds, his sermons were both an intellectual and a spiritual feast. His preaching was evangelical and practical, and his advice to the inquiring bore the stamp of scriptural authority and wisdom.

But in the sacred family circle he was most engaging. There he was unrivalled. The stories of his mind and the treasures of his heart were poured out with lavish profusion. And I have often left his fireside with an impression of his intellectual power, equal if not superior to that made by his public efforts. Such is the idea I have formed of the man we mourn, though at first prejudiced against him. Peace to his memory. The rancor of party spirit will let him sleep undisturbed, and even his enemies will be tempted to do him justice. For even one of his warmest opposers said of him in debate, even when his name had not been hallowed by death, that "God had few such servants on earth."

ALUMNUS.

Extract from an address delivered before the Society of Alumni of Union Theological Seminary, Prince Edward county, Virginia, at the Annual Commencement June 13th, 1848, by the Rev. JOHN H. BOCK, D. D.

But to others of us who came later here, there arises the vision of another face and form, a brow in whose massy proportions nature had carved nobility, a countenance in which with the native beamings of a giant intellect Divine Grace had blended a sacred tenderness, which adored and trembled, and loved and wept, like some holy and sweet-spirited infant. We remember him in the pulpit—how the blood flushed his face, and the tears suffused his eyes, when his own or another's tongue depicted the awful retributions which await unbelieving sinners. As some one passing Dr. Payson's church after his decease pointed over to it and said, "There Payson prayed," so as we pass the neighboring church, the words paraphrase themselves to our thoughts, and we feel, "There Baxter wept." We remember when sometimes he came to the prayer room, late by a minute, and found us singing :