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Miscellaneous Articles.

THE OBDURACY OF THE HUMAN HEART.

IT must have occurred to every attentive reader of the Bible, that its descriptions of human wickedness are very various. Sometimes it speaks of unrenewed men as *altogether sinful*; sometimes it speaks of them as being *full of wickedness*; sometimes as *desperately wicked*, and above all things deceitful; and sometimes it represents them as hard, obdurate, wilful, and obstinate in their wickedness, to the last degree. This is one of the *peculiar characteristics* of sin, and all unconverted sinners. There is an obduracy, a stoutness of spirit about them that never yields. "They have made their faces harder than a *rock*; they have refused to return." God is not wanting in means to arrest their attention, penetrate their conscience, rouse their apprehensions, move their sensibilities, and excite their hopes; but it is all to no purpose. You may induce them to reason, to read, to hear, to reflect, to resolve; but this is not falling in with the proposals of reconciliation and mercy,—this is not accepting Jesus Christ as he is offered in the Gospel. They are wicked men still, and their "carnal mind is enmity against God, not subject to his law, neither indeed can be."

The object of the present essay is to present some illustrations of the obduracy of the natural heart. And,

I. Our first remark is, that it is obduracy that *never yields to divine instruction*. Although the works, the providence, and the word of God contain instruction of a varied character, and though his word especially, comprises a system of truth which involves the highest, the eternal interests of men; yet in all its forms, whether of doctrine, precept, promise, or threatening, it is sure to be resisted. "The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God."

heart. Here were passages of Scripture written, and beneath them his child-comments. Here were tears wept over his sins—prayers for a new heart—tender supplications for his parent and teacher. And on the last leaf was written his sad disappointment at not being permitted to commune on the preceding Sabbath. In short, the teacher discovered from these papers the history of a child brought to Christ through the means of Sabbath-School instruction.

The following day, before the remains of the dear child were committed to the grave, they were taken to the church. The Sabbath School was assembled and the diary of the little boy read in presence of teachers and scholars.

Deep and lasting was the impression made on the minds of teachers and scholars as they learned the history of grace in the heart of this child. Many wept to think he had not been permitted to commune with the Church on earth, but rejoiced to feel that he was now communing with the saints in heaven.

“From that day,” said this good man, “I have vowed before the Lord that wherever my lot was cast, I would be a friend to and a laborer in the great cause of the Sabbath Schools.”—*Southern Presbyterian*.
R. H. A.

Biographical and Historical.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH OF BENJAMIN HOLT RICE, D.D.*

BENJAMIN HOLT RICE, D.D., was born near New London, in Bedford County, Virginia, on the 29th day of November, A.D. 1782. His father, Benjamin Rice, was a lawyer by profession, but for several years filled the post of deputy clerk of the county. He was also a ruling elder in the adjacent Peak and Pisgah Presbyterian congregations, of which his brother, the Rev. David Rice, afterwards called the Apostle of Kentucky, was at that time pastor. The mother of Dr. Rice was Catharine Holt, “a woman of cultivated mind, gentle disposition, and exemplary piety, fondly attached to her husband, and truly devoted to her children.” When Dr. Rice was at the early age of about seven years, this fond and pious mother was removed by death. It would seem, however, that God did not permit the earnest prayers and faithful instructions of this devoted woman to be unavailing. When was such seed, sown by a fond mother’s hand, ever permitted to be ultimately fruitless, even if the sower lived not to see so much as the first and tenderest blade appearing?

His early education was very slender, having amounted, when he

* Extracted from a Discourse by the Rev. WM. F. SCHENK, D.D., formerly pastor of the First Presbyterian Church, Princeton, New Jersey.

reached the age of fifteen, to only six months attendance at a country school. At that age he began to assist his father by writing in the office of the county clerk, in which occupation he continued about five years. It was during this period that he was hopefully brought to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ under the ministry of the Rev. James Turner, a most eloquent preacher, who was at that time his pastor. Dr. Rice was seldom heard in later years to make any reference to the circumstances of his own conversion, so that almost nothing is known respecting his early religious exercises. In the summer of the year 1802, his elder brother, the Rev. John H. Rice, afterwards an eminent light in the Church, and at that time a tutor at Hampden Sydney, made a visit to his father, in the course of which he had some conversation with his brother Benjamin about pursuing a liberal education. The result was that he soon after followed his brother to Hampden Sydney, and there, under his direction, commenced the study of the Latin language. Here he met the Rev. Archibald Alexander, D.D., at that time President of Hampden Sydney College, whose sister he married some years afterward, and for whom he soon formed an admiring friendship, which continued unbroken to the end of life.

In the fall of 1804, the Rev. John H. Rice, having become pastor of the church of Cub Creek in Charlotte County, Virginia, Benjamin went thither with him, and assisted him in teaching a school of some twenty boys, at the same time continuing his own studies under the direction of his brother. During all this portion of his life, his health was extremely bad, and close study was very painful to him. He lived with his brother in all about six years, and received the whole of his education under his direction. At the expiration of this time he went to North Carolina, where he taught school for a time, first at Newbern, and afterwards at Raleigh, in connection with the Rev. Dr. McPheeters.

While at Raleigh, Dr. Rice received his license to preach the Gospel from the Presbytery of Orange, at its sessions in the church at Buffalo, in Guilford County, North Carolina, on the 28th day of September, A.D. 1810. Shortly after the spring of 1811, he was sent as a missionary to the seaboard counties of North Carolina, under an appointment of the General Assembly.* Here he preached at Newbern, Washington, Wilmington, Edenton, and through the intervening region. We are informed that his labours here were abundant. His preaching was with great acceptance and no little success. I have been informed by one who heard him in North Carolina at this time, that "his preaching was peculiarly powerful. The strain of it was richly evangelical, and unusually adapted to awaken and convert sinners." What other fruits sprang from these missionary labours eternity only may reveal. One fact, however, I can state with confidence. On a certain Sabbath in the course of his itinerations, Dr. Rice preached twice at Edenton, and among his hearers was an interesting young man, at that time a student at law. He went to hear, not without strong prejudice, both against the preacher and the truth. But God carried that truth home to his heart, and made it a means of his conversion. That young man is now the Rev. Thomas H. Skinner, D.D., a Professor in the Union Theological Seminary in New York, who always retained a special regard and love for Dr. Rice.

On the 3d day of April, 1812, in the Grove Church, the Presbytery of

* See Minutes of General Assembly for 1811, p. 323.

Orange, "believing that it would tend to promote the interests of the Church," proceeded, after going through the usual examinations, to ordain Mr. Rice, *sine titulo*, and on the next day appointed him a commissioner to attend the approaching meeting of the General Assembly in Philadelphia. After the adjournment of the Assembly, he laboured for about six weeks in the suburbs of that city. Under what auspices these labours were performed, we know not; but as he abode during his sojourn in that city with Dr. A. Alexander, who, while a pastor there, was an earnest advocate of city missions, it was very probably in accordance with some arrangement of his planning, for the destitute and perishing population of the suburbs. In the summer of the same year, having received an appointment from the late General Assembly to labour for four months on the Northern Neck of Virginia,* he determined to select a field of labour where there seemed to be the best prospect of building up a church. While travelling southward through the State of Virginia, and without any human instrumentality to influence him, his mind was irresistibly drawn towards Petersburg in that State. He at once determined to spend the coming winter in that town, and to make full proof of the practicability of gathering there a church of the Lord Jesus Christ. During the summer he visited the town for a few days, preached occasionally, and won the affectionate regard of many individuals with whom he became acquainted. Towards the close of the year (Dec. 15, 1812), he commenced his stated labours, preaching sometimes in an unfinished store-house.

Petersburg at that time contained about eight thousand people, in which number there were two, and *only two* Presbyterians. The population, as a whole, was very indifferent to all religion. Infidelity was wide-spread among them, and card-playing, horse-racing, the theatre, and the ball-room, absorbed the attention of the people. Such was the religious condition of the town into which Dr. Rice, yet a young man, and inexperienced, heroically resolved to enter, for the purpose of planting there the standard of the cross, and taking possession in the name of his Divine Master. A considerable number soon attended his preaching, and some, ere long, had their hearts opened to receive the word. By the close of the year 1813, a church was organized with about twenty members. Dr. Rice was unanimously elected their pastor, and was duly installed by the old Hanover Presbytery, in the spring of 1814. During the earlier part of his ministry in Petersburg, the infidels made great efforts to drive him from the place. They wrote him threatening letters; they circulated all manner of slanders against him; and when these all failed, they strove to set up other churches in opposition to him. It was all in vain. The work was of God, and it went forward. The infant church, from the date of its organization, continued to grow and thrive. It soon became firmly rooted and grounded, and continues to this day a large and flourishing church, a noble monument to the zeal and energy of him who, as the servant of Christ, toilsfully laid its foundation-walls. Seventeen years Dr. Rice continued to be the pastor at Petersburg, and during that time three hundred and nineteen members were added to the church. Several revivals of deep interest occurred, especially one in 1822, when seventy-nine converts were added; one in 1824, when twenty-three were added; and one in 1826, when fifty-two were added. Amidst vicissitudes of encouragement and of discouragement, Dr. Rice's ministry in Petersburg was, upon the whole,

* See Minutes of General Assembly for 1812, p. 12.

eminently successful. It was there, undoubtedly, that he performed the great work of his life, and had he done nothing afterwards, we must have considered his ministry as successful, even beyond that of most preachers of the Gospel.

In the month of May, A. D. 1829, Dr. Rice attended the sessions of the General Assembly in the City of Philadelphia, as one of the commissioners of Hanover Presbytery, and was elected Moderator of the Assembly. He presided in an able and dignified manner. The year following, in the same city, he opened the Assembly with a sermon on John 18 : 36, 37, which was regarded by competent judges as a discourse of extraordinary ability and impressiveness.

In the autumn of the year 1829, Dr. Rice received a call to the Pearl Street Church, in the City of New York. This call, he believed it his duty to accept, and his people at Petersburg, reluctantly, and even tearfully, gave him up to his new charge. He was installed as pastor of the Pearl Street Church on December 3d, 1829. Respecting his labours in New York, I have been able to learn nothing that would be of special interest to you. He evidently did not feel at home in the atmosphere of a great and bustling city, and painfully missed the free and social habits of Virginia life. His frame had been much shattered before he left Petersburg, and he had lost much of that elasticity and buoyancy of spirit which had carried him so successfully through his early labours. After remaining a little less than three years in the Pearl Street Church, he was invited, in July, 1832, to become Associate Secretary of the American Home Missionary Society. Having resigned his pastoral charge, he entered upon the duties of that office in September following, and continued to perform them a little less than a year. In September, A. D. 1832, he received the degree of Doctor in Divinity from the College of New Jersey.

In the summer of 1833, Dr. Rice received a call to become the pastor of this church, at that time the only one of any denomination in Princeton. Having accepted this call, he was duly installed by a Committee of the Presbytery of New Brunswick, August 15th, 1833. On that occasion, the installation sermon was preached by the Rev. Symmes C. Henry of Cranberry; the Rev. Samuel Miller, D.D., gave the charge to the pastor; and the Rev. James Carnahan, D.D., gave the charge to the people. It is surely unnecessary for me here to enter into details respecting the ministry of Dr. Rice among you. These are still fresh in your memories. For nearly fourteen years he was with you, breaking unto you the bread of life. During much of this time he was oppressed by feelings of bodily infirmity. These feelings were much aggravated by the heavy afflictions which befell him in the early part of the year 1844, first, in the sudden death of a favourite daughter,* and again in less than two months after, in the far severer stroke which removed his tenderly-beloved wife,† the

* Mrs. Anne Forman, Dr. Rice's second daughter, died in or near Versailles, Ky., where her husband, the Rev. Ezekiel Forman, was at that time settled as a pastor. She had visited her parents at Princeton in the spring preceding, at which time her health was excellent, and she was uncommonly cheerful in spirit. She gently departed this life January 11th, 1844, after an illness of a few weeks, having given every evidence of being a true Christian. Her last words were, "I wish to be a better Christian."

† Mrs. Martha Rice was the youngest of the nine children of William and Ann Alexander, of Rockbridge County, Virginia, and youngest sister of the late venerated

assiduous and ever cheerful companion of his former toils. Yet he was not without many seals to his ministry among the people of this place. Many of you who now hear my voice, have cause to bless God that you were permitted to hear the Gospel from his lips. And not a few are already with him in the world of glory, who were first brought to receive the truth as it was imparted unto them by him. During the nearly fourteen years of his pastoral labours in this church, two hundred and seventy-one members were added by examination. Although no extended and powerful revival of religion occurred, yet on two several occasions the Spirit of God was more than ordinarily poured out, resulting, in the winter and spring of 1840-1, and again, of 1843-4, in the addition to the church of considerably larger numbers than ordinary. Although his preaching was oftentimes indicative of his infirm health and depression of spirits, it was always evangelical, spiritual, and practical; sometimes earnest and solemn; usually tender and affectionate. When his spirit was roused by any peculiar circumstance, especially by indications of the presence of God's Spirit among his hearers, he rose to flights of ability and eloquence, such as are rarely surpassed in any pulpit.*

A sense of bodily infirmity continuing to grow upon him, he finally offered to the congregation his resignation of his pastoral charge, April 26th, 1847, and the pastoral relation was dissolved by the Presbytery on the 28th day of the same month. He assigned as his reason, that he felt himself unable any longer to discharge properly his duties as pastor of this church. Proceeding to Virginia, he visited, in December following, at Hampden Sydney, his sister-in-law, the widow of Dr. John H. Rice.

Archibald Alexander, D. D. She was born July 28, 1788, and at the early age of about seventeen years, became a member of the Presbyterian church at Lexington, Virginia. She was united to Dr. Rice in marriage, September 23d, 1815, a little more than a year after his installation over the then infant church at Petersburg. She died at Princeton, of a congestive fever, March 6th, 1844, in the fifty-sixth year of her age. She bore a most striking resemblance to her venerable brother, Dr. Alexander, both in her personal appearance and in her mental and moral traits. She was always vivacious and hopeful in her temperament, and was active and earnest in seizing every opportunity for usefulness among the people of her husband's charge. She undoubtedly did much, all through their married life, to sustain and encourage, and thus to promote the usefulness of Dr. Rice, whose temperament strongly inclined him to a morbid despondency. During her last illness, which was of about three weeks duration, she enjoyed uninterrupted serenity and confidence to the last. Even when speechless she understood everything; and when her husband asked her whether she could now say that God had given her victory over death, and requested her to signify it by raising her hand, she immediately did this, and soon after expired. The people of Princeton expressed their sense of her virtues and their loss, by erecting a neat marble monument upon her grave, upon which is placed an appropriate and touching epitaph.

* In confirmation of this assertion, we quote a few sentences from an article published in the *Presbyterian Herald* at Louisville, Ky., shortly after Dr. Rice's death. The article is presumed to be from the pen of the Rev. W. W. Hill, D.D., the editor of that paper. "Dr. Rice's preaching was earnest, plain, and eminently practical, and when he was thoroughly aroused, at times it became eloquent and powerful. We remember to have heard him for near two weeks, twice a day, in the famous revival in Bound Brook Congregation, which occurred in 1836, and we never heard the doctrines and duties of the Gospel presented with more searching power and eloquence, than they were presented by him at that time." Dr. Rice took peculiar pleasure in aiding his ministerial brethren at such times, and was always ready promptly to respond to their calls for help, both when in Virginia and at the North. It is probable that no small portion of the usefulness of his life was found in these occasional visits to other congregations.

The College Church at that place was vacant at that time, and soon after made out a call for him. He at first agreed to stay six months, but afterwards accepted the call, and was installed shortly after the spring meeting of the Presbytery.

Here, amidst friends of his youth, and scenes of his early studies, he was destined to perform his last labours, and to end his days. The circumstances which surrounded Dr. Rice during his residence in New York and Princeton, were evidently not congenial to his temperament and habits. But after his return to Virginia, his heart settled itself in the conviction that he was once more *at home*, and his mind recovered a large measure of the freedom of its early action. In the vicinity of his church he purchased a little farm, and both mind and body were much benefited by a moderate attention to agricultural pursuits. One who occasionally heard him in these last years, testifies that "although the fire of his youthful ardour was gone, yet the warmth of his large, loving heart remained, and at times, his mind raised to its former elevation of tone, his rich, clear, and earnest utterance would delight, and captivate, and startle, as in the days of his unabated vigour. In these days his peculiar glory was in the social meeting, at the communion table, and in personal converse with anxiously inquiring sinners." Indeed, in these last years, Dr. Rice seems to have resumed no small share of the large popularity and influence he enjoyed in Virginia during his labours in Petersburg. His attendance at meetings of Presbytery and Synod was greeted with affectionate respect, and although he spoke seldom, he was invariably heard with deference.

It was the happiness of him who addresses you, to have a last and most pleasing interview with Dr. Rice during the sessions of the Synod of Virginia, at Lexington, in October last. Never will he forget the hearty grasp of the hand, the kindly tones and cordial smiles with which he was there greeted, by the friend and pastor of his early youth. Dr. Rice's increasingly bowed form, and his general appearance, betokened sadly, that he was travelling down the vale of years. Yet when, on Sabbath afternoon and on a sacramental occasion, he addressed the Synod, there was even more than the fire, and energy, and fluency of twenty years ago.

The closing scene of Dr. Rice's life is graphically described in an account penned by the very competent hand of one residing on the spot.* I will give you as brief an abstract of it as I can.

The state of Dr. Rice's health had given much solicitude to carefully observing friends, for some months before his death. Yet, during the two months preceding the fatal attack, he had regularly occupied his pulpit. On Sabbath, the 17th February last, according to previous notice, a collection was to be taken for Domestic Missions, and Dr. Rice had prepared an appropriate discourse on Exodus 14 : 15 : "Speak to the children of Israel, that they go forward." The day, however, proved to be remarkably inclement, and the collection having been postponed, he proceeded to make another and extemporaneous use of the same text, applying it to Christians. He then turned to the impenitent among his hearers, saying

* The account referred to was written by the Rev. Benjamin M. Smith, D.D., Professor in Union Theological Seminary, Prince Edwards County, Va., and was published in the *Central Presbyterian* at Richmond.

solemnly, "You are in the way of death, and every step forward brings you nearer to your ruin. To you I dare not say go forward, but retreat, and advance not another step until you have found the right path and entered it." He continued in this strain of clear and animated remark for some time, when his voice became too subdued to be heard over the house, and he seemed rather like one thinking aloud. Pausing, he made a sign for a glass of water, and as he took it, he remarked, that his tongue was becoming paralyzed. The Rev. Lewis W. Green, D.D., and A. A. Rice, M.D. (Dr. Rice's son), immediately went to him. The former gentleman gave out a hymn, but before the singing began, Dr. Rice arose, and evidently feeling that this was *his last opportunity*, leaned forward on the pulpit and said, "I wish to say a word to my Christian brethren. *Are you all going forward in the divine life? Are you growing in grace and in fitness for heaven?*" This was uttered with great difficulty, and was scarcely intelligible beyond the immediate vicinity of the pulpit. He was supported back to the seat, and it was found necessary to lift him from the pulpit, whence he was borne out amidst the sighs and tears of his afflicted and bereaved people, never more to return alive. He lived on until the following Sabbath, February 24, 1856, on the morning of which day, very appropriately, he entered into his rest. He never recovered his speech sufficiently to speak with usual distinctness, though enough to be partially understood. His thoughts still dwelt at times on the subject of his projected discourse, and even when his tongue refused fully to perform its office, the words "go forward," and "a wide world," could be distinguished. His faith in an all-sufficient Saviour and his precious promises remained strong and unwavering to the very last. In a conversation with one of his physicians not long before his end, he said that he desired to live only that he might preach the Gospel.

He died peacefully, in the very work of the ministry, with the harness on. He has doubtless already rejoined the sainted companions of his earthly pilgrimage, and with Turner, and Hoge, and Laey, and Lyle, and Baxter, and Miller, and Alexander, and his brother, Dr. John H. Rice, is inhabiting the blessed mansions prepared for them by a Saviour's love.

"There the saints of all ages in harmony meet,
Their Saviour and brethren transported to greet,
Whilst the anthems of pleasure unceasingly roll,
And the smile of the Lord is the feast of the soul."

On Monday morning, February 25th, they laid his mortal remains to rest in the graveyard at Willington, about three miles from the church, and beside the honoured dust of his eminent and sainted brother, who had preceded him to the grave a little over twenty-five years. A large concourse of families of his charge and officers and students of the College and Seminary attended his remains to the grave. Many College students followed the hearse on foot the whole distance. A few brief remarks were made, and a prayer was offered by a Professor of the Seminary,* and the 622d hymn was sung, after which they left his dust to sleep on until the resurrection morn.

* Rev. Benjamin M. Smith, D.D.