



REV. H. C. ALEXANDER, D. D., LL. D.

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I. LITERARY.

HENRY CARRINGTON ALEXANDER.

By RICHARD McILWAINE.

THE subject of this sketch was born at Princeton, N. J., of Virginia parents, on the 27th of September, 1835. His father was Rev. Dr. James Waddel Alexander, at one time the first pastor of "Village Church," Charlotte Court House, Va.; then pastor at Trenton, N. J.; then professor of Latin and the *Belles Lettres* in the College of New Jersey; then pastor of the Duane-Street Church in New York; afterwards professor of Church History and Polity in Princeton Seminary, and died as pastor of the Fifth Avenue Presbyterian church, New York. His mother was a daughter of Dr. George Cabell, of Richmond, and a niece of judge (and governor) William Cabell, of the same city, and of Mr. Joseph C. Cabell, of Nelson, the friend of Thomas Jefferson and his colaborer in founding the University of Virginia. His grandfather was the Rev. Dr. Archibald Alexander, the theological teacher and author; once President of Hampden-Sidney College in Virginia; afterwards a pastor in Philadelphia, and one of the two original professors at Princeton Theological Seminary, where he performed the great work of his life. His grandmother (Mrs. Dr. A. Alexander) was the daughter of Rev. James Waddel, of Hanover Presbytery, widely known as the blind preacher, whose eloquence is commemorated in "The British Spy" of William Wirt. His paternal grandparents were both of Scotch Irish extraction, their families having emigrated first to Pennsylvania and afterwards to Rockbridge county, Virginia.

Dr. Alexander's early instruction was received from his parents and his grandfather. After going to successive schools,

he was again taught by his father, and subsequently received daily lessons from his uncle, Rev. Dr. Joseph Addison Alexander, the well known linguist, professor, teacher and commentator. He entered the College of New Jersey, as Freshman, half advanced, and graduated in the year 1854. After a year spent in Virginia, visiting and travelling during the summer and attending medical and other lectures at the State University, where his uncle, Dr. James L. Cabell, was a member of the Medical Faculty, he took a full course at Princeton Seminary, and was licensed to preach by the Presbytery of New York in the spring of 1858. He supplied the Eighty-Fourth-Street church, New York, for six months, and in 1859, became stated supply at "Village Church," where his father and grandfather had labored before him, and where he was himself ordained and installed in the year 1861. Here he remained until January, 1870, when he entered on the duties of the chair of *Biblical Literature and New Testament Interpretation* in Union Theological Seminary in Virginia, and continued to hold this position till his peremptory resignation in 1891. During the latter part of last session besides filling his own chair, he instructed the Senior Class in Hampden-Sidney College in Apologetics, winning thereby golden opinions from the students and receiving the special thanks of the Board of Trustees, who conferred on him at commencement the well-merited honorary degree of LL. D. as they had already years before bestowed on him the degree of D. D. He also received from King College, Tenn., several years since, the degree of B. Lit. In the year 1870, Dr. Alexander brought out the life of his uncle, Dr. J. A. Alexander, in two octavo volumes. He has also been the author of numerous articles in newspapers, magazines and quarterly reviews. He used to contribute verse to the "Knickerbocker"; prose to "Putnam's," and both prose and verse later on to "Hours at Home"—a publication out of which both the "Scribners'" and the "Century" eventually grew. Among the titles of his articles and stanzas in print, were these: "A Night Never to be Forgotten"; "What I Saw of the Shah"; "The Metaphysical Postulate of Mr. Herbert Spencer's First Principles"; "Agnosticism"; "The General Doctrine of Inspiration," and "The Doctrine of Inspiration Contemplated on its Divine and on its Human Side." Besides these and a number more, he wrote many newspaper communications, editorials, etc. He is at present supplying tempo-

rarily the Garrett Memorial church, at Oakland, Md., and the Church of Terra Alta, in West Virginia.

From the foregoing sketch, it will be seen that Dr. Alexander is a many-sided man. He seems to combine in himself the best traits of the numerous distinguished people from whom he is descended. Possessed by nature of a quick, sharp and comprehensive intellect, reared in a scholarly atmosphere and endowed with a retentive memory, it is not wonderful that his acquisitions should be vast. In the magnitude, minuteness and accuracy of his learning, he is perhaps unexcelled in our section and has few rivals in the whole country. His knowledge is simply gigantic. On almost any subject that comes up he can discourse instructively without special preparation, and will astonish his hearers by the minuteness and extent of his information. As a professor, the only criticism I have ever heard of him is, that his acquaintance with the subject before him is so extensive and his knowledge of all that has been said about it, in ancient and modern times, is so large that he is apt to detail the views of others, and to state possible opinions and interpretations for his class to choose between, instead of giving them clean-cut dogmatic statements which are to be received and believed. This criticism, while apparently hostile, reveals Dr. Alexander's crowning excellence as a teacher. He did not regard the students of the Theological Seminary as boys to be drilled, or as chickens and turkeys to be stuffed, but as intelligent young gentlemen with considerable culture—the ministry of the future—who now under safe guidance were learning to think for themselves on the most important of all subjects; to form their own and not to gulp down the opinions of others; to investigate for themselves, and thus to find out the truth, in order that being well established in it, they might proclaim it to others in its richness and fulness. Such teaching is just the kind that ought to prevail in our theological seminaries and universities, and indeed in all schools of higher learning, where the students are anything more than boys or dullards, who need to have knowledge crammed into them instead of being taught to search for and discriminate it for themselves. It is not surprising, therefore, that many of Dr. Alexander's old students look back to him as the most instructive and inspiring teacher they ever had, and regard him with unbounded affection and admiration.

As a preacher, while a pastor, Dr. Alexander attained great

excellence. Few men of his age were more eminent or popular. He then wrote his sermons carefully and spoke them with much power. At times crowded congregations were electrified and held spell bound by his eloquence. His assistance was freely sought and accorded in protracted meetings, and his preaching was blessed to many souls. To say that he has not maintained this standard, is just to say that he has suffered the fate which accompanies all teachers; and, indeed, all preachers whose minds are not continuously and intently on preaching as the one great duty of life; and that he is twenty years older than he was then.

As a pastor, no man ever enjoyed more of the confidence and friendship of his flock and the community. While "a man of books" and highly esteemed for his erudition, he was not a *bookish* man, but loved people and delighted to know and associate with them as such, irrespective of fictitious position or adventitious circumstance. He knew everybody; loved everybody; tried to do everybody good. The poor were as dear to him as the rich; the ignorant as the educated. He went where duty prompted; endured hardness as a good soldier, and was welcome in every house. His memory will long be cherished in that congregation, and among the people of Appomattox church, not far from Union Seminary, in which he stately labored many years during his professorial life.

Dr. Alexander has been a great traveller in this country and abroad; is a connoisseur in music and art, and has made his tours tributary to his thirst for culture. There are few countries in Europe that he has not traversed, and each journey was undertaken on a well-digested plan and with a definite end in view. Sometimes he would gratify his taste by exploring the most noted scenery in the countries of the Old World. Sometimes he would spend his whole vacation in the capitals of Europe where the finest musical talent was to be enjoyed. Sometimes he would give himself wholly to the study of painting and sculpture in the renowned galleries of Great Britain and the Continent. He has thus obtained a refinement and elevation of culture which the less highly favored find it hard to appreciate, but which admirably fitted him for such a position as that he has just left.

As a Christian, Dr. Alexander is absolutely free from cant, and contents himself with that kind of religion which one of the apostles calls "pure and undefiled"; which another com-

mends in the injunction, "but to do good and to communicate forget not," and of which our adorable Lord and Master, Jesus Christ, who is spoken of as one "who went about doing good," is the great exemplar; as a theologian he is sound to the core according to our Presbyterian standard; as a man, he fills all the relations of life well; as a friend, he is true as steel and confiding as a child; as a citizen, he is ever ready to uphold the dignity of the government, and to lend his support to every measure that is for the good of the people. Although born in New Jersey, he is a true southerner and glories in being a Virginian.

Many of the friends of Union Seminary think it has suffered an irreparable loss in his departure. Not since the death of the noble Sampson, nearly forty years ago, has this institution received so serious a blow. Fortunately the vacated chair has been occupied by a gentleman of ability, scholarly attainments, experience and reputation, whose success is assured, but the absence of Alexander creates a void, which it will be hard to fill.

HAMPDEN-SIDNEY, VA., *September 5, 1891.*