



William Coombs Dana.

THE LIFE

OF

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DANIEL DANA, D.D.

BY MEMBERS OF HIS FAMILY.

WITH A

SKETCH OF HIS CHARACTER,

BY

W. B. SPRAGUE, D.D.

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RECOLLECTIONS OF DR. DANA.

BY W. B. SPRAGUE, D.D.

THE true index to the character is the life — we infer what a man is from what he does. Especially does this remark apply, where the outer man is only the spontaneous flowing forth of the inner — where no cunning and tortuous spirit is suffered to intervene to prevent the doings of the hands and the utterances of the lips from answering faithfully to the movements of the heart. It is hardly needful to say that it is the life of an eminently guileless, and, in the best sense, simple-hearted individual, that is narrated in the preceding pages; and it may safely be presumed that no one who has traced his interesting career, and marked his conduct in the various relations he sustained, and the various positions of difficulty and trial, of high responsibility and honorable usefulness, which he occupied, can fail to have a definite idea of all the prominent qualities of his mind and heart. Still, as his children, in whose wishes I recognize a law, have intimated a desire that I should sum up the narrative of his life, which is itself a fitting and grateful offering of filial devotion, by a brief estimate of his character, I cheerfully undertake the office which their kindness has assigned to me. It is due to candor, however, to state

that my acquaintance with this venerable man did not commence till I had been some years in the ministry; that my intercourse with him, though free and intimate, has never been more than occasional; though I have somehow felt that I had penetrated into the interior of his heart, and the embarrassment which I feel in writing about him, results, not from my being in doubt in respect to any points of his character, but from a conscious inability to transfer to other minds the impression which he has left upon my own. I shall attempt nothing beyond a mere outline.

Dr. Dana's personal appearance, if not imposing, was altogether prepossessing, and prepared one to find in his character the fine intellectual and moral qualities which an acquaintance with him was sure to reveal. He was rather above the middle height, and was symmetrically formed; though, in his latter years particularly, his head, as he stood or walked, had a slight inclination forward. In his countenance, it was difficult to say whether the intellectual or the moral had the predominance; but no one could see him without being struck with the expression of earnest thoughtfulness on the one hand, and intense benevolence on the other. There was a look of calm dignity, I had almost said of modest reserve, that could hardly fail to elicit a deferential regard, even from a stranger who should meet him in the market-place. His movements, without being particularly graceful, were simple and natural, and seemed to indicate a consciousness of having something to do. In his manners he was bland, quiet, genial, self-possessed — he was generally grave, though he had a vein of humor that occasionally flashed out in innocent merriment, rendering him quite the life of the social

circle. It is presumed that his whole life might be safely challenged for a single act that could reasonably be considered as inconsistent with the dignity of either a gentleman or a Christian.

Dr. Dana's intellect was at once comprehensive, acute, clear, and thorough. In his investigations of truth, he descended to first principles, and, having planted himself first on a basis that he felt sure could not be moved, he gradually worked his way onward to a remote conclusion, each successive step bringing him into a brighter and still brighter light. He had the power of discerning the minute differences of things with great accuracy, and though he would sometimes hold a difficult subject to his mind for a long time in patient investigation, yet he would never leap at a conclusion in the dark, or suffer himself to be bewildered by a premature admission of what he could not see clearly. With his uncommon powers of analysis he combined a remarkably exact and cultivated taste — insomuch that his ordinary compositions would very well bear to be referred to the most rigid standard. His memory also was much more than ordinarily tenacious, and it was interesting to see how, even in his old age, the results of his early reading, as well as his long-continued observation, seemed to be entirely at his command. An extraordinary fondness for study had been among his earliest developments; and this did not become less as he advanced in life; and the consequence of this early and ever-enduring habit, in connection with the best opportunities for improvement, was, that he attained to a very high degree of intellectual culture. As his mind was originally cast in a mould of uncommon symmetry, so there was a due

proportion maintained in the cultivation of his different faculties; and hence the whole intellectual man attracted your attention and admiration, rather than any one distinguishing feature.

Dr. Dana was, in some respects, highly favored in his moral constitution; though his moral character was so identified with his religious, that it is impossible to do justice to the one without taking into view the other. He had naturally warm and generous sensibilities: his heart was alive to the joys of friendship, and it vibrated in quick response to every note of sorrow. He united great gentleness with great firmness: his tones were always bland, his words and manner always kind, and it evidently cost him a sacrifice to take the attitude of an antagonist in any thing; but no flatteries could beguile him, no threats could intimidate him, into the semblance of a compromise of his own honest convictions. His firmness may have sometimes been mistaken for obstinacy; but it was not even akin to it. He was firm because he was conscientious—because he felt, that, come what would, God must be obeyed rather than man. He would not needlessly give offence to a mortal; but, if this must be the alternative to the following out of his honest convictions of duty, his course was so plain that he had no occasion to bestow upon it a thought. However he might differ from an individual in respect to religion or any other subject, he never felt himself called upon, for that reason, to treat him with coolness or discourtesy, or withhold from him any expression of good will, though he may have felt constrained to do what he could to convince him of what he believed to be his error. One of his most intimate and valued friends, as appears from the narra-

tive of his life, was the late Dr. Benjamin Abbot, long the accomplished and honored Principal of the Phillips Exeter Academy, who is understood to have held some form of Unitarianism; and though there is no doubt that Dr. Dana, in all fidelity to his convictions, conversed with him freely and earnestly on the points of difference between them, yet it is evident that their early friendship never lost any degree of its intensity, so long as they were both among the living.

It is scarcely necessary to add, in this connection, that Dr. Dana, in all his intercourse and deportment, was a fine example of Christian prudence. His tongue had never learned to utter harsh, or bitter, or even hasty words; but it had been trained to move in obedience to the law of kindness. He was always most considerate of time, and place, and circumstances, and never, by any random speech in a promiscuous company, run the hazard of giving offence or pain to any one present. He was social and communicative on all ordinary occasions, but he was sure to hold his peace when he had nothing to say. His cautious and conciliatory spirit, in connection with his acknowledged general wisdom, gave him great consideration as a counselor; and in this capacity he was often put in requisition, and most successfully, not only to settle private controversies, but to restore harmony to contending and distracted congregations.

He possessed great natural sensitiveness; and possibly this sometimes took on a morbid form, and gave a sombre and desponding hue to some of his judgments and feelings. When he was called to the presidency of Dartmouth College, all his convictions and predilections were at first adverse to an acceptance of the

appointment : but the earnest wishes of his friends and the friends of the college, together with their enthusiastic predictions of his complete success, proved an overmatch for his first decided preference, and he was brought, though most reluctantly, to the conclusion, that perhaps it was his duty to take the new position that was offered to him ; though it is doubtful whether he was altogether free from misgivings when he accepted the appointment. The result of this movement seemed, perhaps, one of the most mysterious events of his life. Scarcely had the voice of gratulation in connection with the inaugural ceremonies died away, before his health became seriously impaired, his mind became cheerless and despondent, and he was oppressed by the gloomy conviction of his utter inadequacy to the duties he had undertaken ; and after a very brief experiment, — too brief, many would have said, — in which he seems to have had little enjoyment, and to have thought that his hopes of usefulness were but poorly realized, he tendered the resignation of his office. Without deciding whether or not he reached a wise conclusion in this matter, it cannot be doubted that, with stronger nerve and more vigorous health, he would at least have waited longer before he retired from a place in which he had already become fixed, and for which his friends believed that he possessed high qualifications.

Dr. Dana was an eminently devout man. It was impossible to be in habits of intercourse with him, without feeling one's self in contact with a heart that was glowing with love to Christ, and in intimate communion with him. He did not make this manifest so much by set and formal conversations, as by those inci-

dental and apparently unconscious outgoings, which, where the heart is full, nothing can suppress, and no one ever heard him pray, without feeling that he was not only at home in the exercise, but greatly delighted in it. Humility, faith, reverence, gratitude, every element of devotion, was beautifully represented in his fervent addresses at the throne of mercy.

He was, moreover, a model of Christian consistency. Sometimes men who talk much and pray much, after all do little; or else they do so much in the wrong direction, and in the wrong manner, that even Charity herself is obliged to pause before deciding upon their probable character. Not so with the venerable man who is the subject of these remarks: with him, prayer and alms, faith and works, went together — because he endeavored to conform every part of his conduct to the Bible standard, there were no unsightly protuberances in his character, — nothing to outrage a correct taste, or shock one's sensibilities, or suggest the inquiry, how so much that is good can consist with so much that is exceptionable. He was careful not only to cultivate every grace, but to cultivate each in due proportion; and thus it was, that even the world, and the most scrutinizing and captious portion of it, awarded to him the high praise of being a consistent Christian.

Dr. Dana was a well-read and able theologian. He had made theology his study from early life, and he always delighted in it. The system which he received in the beginning, was the same to which he held fast to the end: it was not only Calvinism as opposed to Arminianism, but Calvinism as opposed to Hopkinsianism, — the real, undiluted Puritan theology. Though

he had a mind capable of profound philosophical research, he allowed philosophy little scope in settling or shaping the doctrines of Christianity. The one only inquiry which he was interested to answer was, "What saith the Scripture?" and that point once settled, his faith was as firm as a mountain. Wherever he thought he detected any departure from "the old paths," he always stood ready to bear his testimony against it, no matter how great the sacrifice it might cost him. But notwithstanding he contended so earnestly for the purity of the faith, he never seemed partial to the extreme technology of any school; and it happened, in one or more instances, that his own orthodoxy was temporarily at a discount, from the fact that he used either too sparingly, or not at all, some of the accredited religious phraseology of the day. His theological views were well defined, and as he held them with undoubting confidence, so he was ready to defend them with great skill at whatever point they might be assailed.

Dr. Dana was an admirable preacher. He had fine natural qualifications for the pulpit, almost the only drawback being the use of green spectacles, in consequence of an early and enduring injury to his eyes, by means of which the audience lost the inspiring effect of his bright and animated eye. He usually preached from a manuscript, though he extemporized with great ease, and of many of his discourses, nothing beyond the starting outline was written. His voice was rich, sonorous, and mellow, and, in its full volume, was large enough to fill a church of the largest dimensions; though its tones were not greatly varied. He spoke with great fervor and unction, and showed evidently that he was absorbed in his subject, though he had but

little gesture, and there was no approach to any thing declamatory or boisterous. If his elocution was not particularly graceful, it was highly effective—it was the soul coming out in rich and earnest thoughts and well adapted words. The matter of his preaching was intensely evangelical. In the selection of his themes, he always kept near the Cross; and, in his treatment of them, he made no show of learning beyond what his subject manifestly required. His preaching was happily divided between the doctrinal, the practical, and the experimental; or rather they all harmoniously commingled in almost every discourse. He reasoned, and often with great power; but his reasoning was so simple and luminous as to be within the comprehension of the humblest of his hearers. He dealt in great fidelity with the Church, drawing the line most carefully between true and false religion, and urging upon all who had named the name of Christ, not only to depart from iniquity, but to let their light shine. In his appeals to the careless and ungodly, he was most persuasive and impressive, and sometimes the terrors of the law went forth from his lips in words of burning import. It was impossible to listen to him without being impressed with the idea that every sentence that he uttered came from his inmost soul; and that he knew no other motive in preaching the gospel than to glorify his Master in saving the souls of his fellow-men.

He was eminently qualified for the more private duties of a pastor, and his heart rejoiced in the discharge of them. Constituted as he was with quick and generous sympathies, with an ear and a heart always awake and open to the tale of woe, he was like an

angel of mercy in the chamber of sickness, at the bed of death, and amidst scenes of bereavement; and it is no wonder that his services in this capacity should often have been sought, beyond the limits of his own immediate charge. He was emphatically the friend of the poor; and there is no doubt that it was this beautiful feature of his character that suggested to some of his friends, after he resigned his last pastoral charge, the idea of his being employed, as his strength might permit, as a minister at large; and probably it was this that predisposed him to accept their kind proposals. In this humble field, his sympathetic heart found objects enough to act upon. As the venerable man who had, for almost sixty years, been an object of grateful respect not only in his own city and State, but throughout New England, passed around from street to street, stepping into one wretched hovel after another, and leaving there his blessing in the form of words of tender sympathy, or Christian counsel, or fervent prayer, his name became deeply engraven on the hearts of those to whom he thus ministered; and no doubt some of them, in the grateful remembrance of those visits, have already heaped their benedictions upon him in a better world.

Dr. Dana was little disposed to put himself forward as a leader in deliberative bodies — his naturally modest and retiring spirit rather disposed him to keep himself in the background; and yet he could be active and earnest enough when he felt that the occasion required it; and his acknowledged remarkable soundness of judgment and prudent foresight gave great weight to his opinions, however briefly or casually expressed. Indeed, so much was he respected and

honored, that his very presence, even when he kept silent, was felt to be an element of power.

Dr. Dana, as might naturally be inferred from the intellectual qualities already attributed to him, ranked among the best writers of his day. Most of his published works are occasional discourses, though he is the author of two or three pamphlets which are of a decidedly controversial character. He had great facility at adapting himself to an occasion, and seemed always to enter fully into the spirit of it, seizing, as if by intuition, upon its most prominent characteristics. In controversy, he never lost his self-possession, or good temper, or regard to Christian decorum; but, while he evidently wrote under a deep sense of the importance of his subject, and of the responsibility pertaining to the attitude which he had assumed, he was always perfectly respectful in the treatment of his antagonist. Even those who did not sympathize in the views which he was endeavoring to establish, admired the carefulness and the candor with which he stated them, as well as the force and discrimination with which he defended them. A crowning excellence of his writing was the precision, simplicity, and purity of his style — he had made the best English writers a study, and had imperceptibly imbibed their excellences, without attempting to imitate them. Though there are many whose productions contain more that is bold and striking, and to the common mind attractive, it may safely be said there are but few who more rarely or more lightly offend against good taste and good logic, than Dr. Dana.

It is hardly necessary to add, that Dr. Dana was an earnest friend of revivals of religion; and he labored

to promote them, by every legitimate means, to the extent of his ability. But he was, nevertheless, a strict adherent to all the principles of evangelical order; and would never, even under circumstances of the greatest excitement, consent to the slightest compromise of Christian decorum. He did not indeed doubt that much good is often accomplished where the great truth, that God is a God of order, is practically, to some extent, overlooked; but as he saw no warrant in the Bible, and certainly found none in his own inherent sense of Christian propriety, for the irregularities and extravagances which have sometimes been exhibited, even within the limits of his own communion, he felt constrained, wherever he met them, to resist them, as at least marring the revival with which they were connected, if they did not vitiate it altogether. He looked for the evidences of a genuine work of God's Spirit rather in a deep and all-pervading solemnity, than in an overflow of animal feeling; rather in the utterances of the "still small voice," than in the storm and the earthquake.

It is not too much to say of Dr. Dana, that he was one of the most able, devoted, useful ministers of the period in which he lived. Happily his early training was under the best influences; and that, with a naturally docile spirit and wakeful conscience, proved, under the divine care and guidance, an adequate security against all youthful aberrations. Neither he nor his friends ever had occasion to look back to a period in which he had even begun to walk in the counsel of the ungodly, or to stand in the way of sinners. Even before he became the subject of a spiritual renovation, he was uniformly exemplary in his conduct,

and strongly attracted to himself all with whom he had intercourse. But, from the commencement of his Christian life, he seems to have been a shining light, ever shining brighter — as new spheres of usefulness successively opened to him, his heart expanded in broader sympathy with all the great interests of humanity, and his mind woke to a correspondingly higher tone of effort to promote the well-being of all who were within his reach. In the gracious ordering of Providence, his first and principal field of ministerial labor was one which, while, from the elevated tone of society in the neighborhood, it furnished excellent advantages for intellectual and social culture, was also admirably adapted to bring his various faculties into exercise in the best manner and to the best purpose. From the time that his connection with Dartmouth College ceased, the congregations to which he ministered were less prominent in their relation to the Presbyterian Church than that of which he had previously had the charge; but, even in these narrower spheres, his active and devoted life could not but tell powerfully upon the interests of truth and piety; and indeed, though he was eminently faithful to those who were under his immediate care, his example was always shining for the benefit of the whole community, and his general influence went out through innumerable channels to bless the Church and the world at large. It was impossible, that, with so meek and unobtrusive a spirit as he possessed, he should have ever put himself forward in any enterprise where he could labor with equal advantage in subordination to others; but his whole life, though noiseless as the dew, was a calm and steady course of efficient activity.

His influence in connection with different institutions; his influence upon the Christian ministry, especially in rebuking the vagaries of fanaticism in regard to revivals of religion; his influence in the higher walks of society, in inspiring respect for his office, and checking the tendencies to a perversion of God's gifts, and in the lower walks of society, by mingling with them as a helper and a comforter, and quickening their self-respect, and counselling them how to live, and directing their views upward, — his influence, exerted through these various channels and over these widely extended fields, must be seen in the light that shines beyond the dark valley, before any adequate estimate can be formed of it. But his great and good influence has survived him; and not only so, but it is rising, and deepening, and spreading like the light of Heaven; and, after centuries have rolled over his grave, his quiet and godly life on earth will still be perpetuated in the character and destiny of each passing generation. This thought is rich in consolation, when applied to any good man; but in reference to one whose whole life, as in the case of Dr. Dana, has been one steady, earnest, loving, protracted course of self-consecration to God and man, it comes upon us as a distinct benediction. When the secrets of all hearts shall be revealed, and each one shall be able to read, by the light that shines around the eternal throne, the history of the formation of his own character, no doubt multitudes who never on earth knew their obligation to him, will stand forth the glorified witnesses to his fidelity.

As Dr. Dana's course through life was marked by eminent usefulness, so he was eminently honored both

in the Church and in the world. As he was incapable of all unworthy concealment, so he passed for just what he was — the judgment which the public formed of him was in accordance with what they saw; and they saw as little to censure, as much to approve and admire, as perhaps in any other man. He was not a time-server, nor a man who hesitated to give utterance to his convictions when he thought duty called, though it must be at the expense of differing with his best friends; but, even in such cases, his undoubted integrity and high conscientiousness could not but command universal respect. In every place in which he lived, the community loved and venerated him; and many were the tokens of good-will that came to him as well from those in low places as in high. As he advanced in years, especially as he drew near to the end of his course, while he moved about with patriarchal dignity, he was looked upon with the reverence to which a patriarch would be entitled. Whenever he appeared in any public body, especially in the Presbytery of which he was a member, his brethren instinctively testified their affectionate respect for his character, and their confidence in the wisdom of his suggestions and counsels. After he had become too infirm to leave his chamber, and was even confined to his bed, they made him a farewell visit, as they would have gone to the chamber of Abraham or Jacob, when he was gathering himself up to die; and that visit awoke both his faculties and sensibilities into lively exercise; and his lips, and his eyes, and his whole visage, became eloquent, and it really seemed as if he was transfigured before them. They were completely bowed under his tender and sublime utterances; and as he took them success-

ively by the hand, confident that he should see their faces no more, his whole soul evidently impressed itself upon the last benediction. It actually seemed as if the Heavens had come down into that chamber to bear the waiting spirit upward. And when the day of his funeral came, the whole community in which he lived became a mourning community, — the addresses which were delivered over his coffin were a fitting tribute to his exalted worth, — a testimony that no ordinary light had been extinguished, — the prayers that were offered were the breathings of deeply smitten hearts — and the long procession that followed him to his last resting-place, instead of being a heartless and unmeaning pageant, proclaimed, silently indeed, but more impressively than words could have done, that Heaven had claimed one of the purest, brightest spirits that earth had to lose. And, as the news of his death went abroad through the land, many hearts were set to throbbing sadly that the guide of their youth, or perhaps the friend of their later years, was gone; while the whole Church mournfully realized that one of her strong pillars had been stricken down, one of her brightest stars translated to a higher sphere. The generation which he has left has already embalmed his memory; and future generations will take care that his name, his character, his services, are not forgotten.

I regard it as a signal privilege that I was permitted, for many years, to share the friendship and confidence of this venerable man. I think my acquaintance with him commenced in 1826, on occasion of my passing a Sabbath in Newburyport, when, by his request, I occupied his pulpit a part of the day. I was

struck with his extremely bland and unassuming manner, the great kindliness of his spirit, and the good judgment that he evinced in respect to every subject that we conversed upon. The next time I met him, if my memory serves me, was in 1827, at the meeting of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church at Philadelphia, both of us being delegates to that body. He appeared there with his characteristic modesty, and I think his voice was scarcely heard in any of the deliberations; but it was evident that he commanded general and great respect from the members. He preached during the session, at least once; and I believe that was the only time I ever heard him. His discourse answered well to the description already given of his efforts in the pulpit: it was a simple, logical, luminous exhibition of one of the great truths of the gospel, and was delivered in a style of simplicity and earnestness that was to me quite irresistible. Here I resumed my acquaintance with him, and, as we were thrown much together during the two or three weeks that the Assembly was in session, I had the opportunity of observing more particularly his distinctive characteristics; and my intercourse with him at this time gave him an abiding place in my heart. I found in him a most generous friend, who never seemed to regard any sacrifice that was involved in doing me a favor. In several enterprises, partly of a literary and partly of a religious character, he has rendered me most effective aid; and he has done it so cheerfully that one might have supposed that he was receiving a favor instead of bestowing it. During several of his last years, I have paid him an annual visit; and I can truly say that it has marked a bright spot in the year: for I have reckoned it no com-

mon privilege to get a sight of his venerable form, and listen to his words of wisdom and kindness, and catch the breathings of his heavenly spirit. In these visits I have had the opportunity of observing what a model of dignity and tenderness and consideration he was in his own family; how the life of his children seemed but one unbroken ministration of filial love, while his mild and gentle presence, his beaming smile, and bright sayings, and fervent, child like prayers, made that house a scene of cheerful but hallowed sunshine. I saw too, from year to year, that he was becoming more and more unearthly in his feelings and aspirations; that, while his spirit lost nothing of its kindly and genial tone towards those around him, it was evidently all the time girding itself for its upward flight. In his family prayers there was a richness, a sweetness, a tenderness, the savor of which lingered with me long after I had left him; and, as his eye is not to rest upon what I write, I may be permitted to add that, on one occasion, I was awaked, at the dawn of day, by the fervent expressions of gratitude and praise which I heard going up from him as he lay in an adjoining chamber. In all my intercourse with him, I cannot recall a single harsh expression, or any thing that indicated the absence of a benevolent spirit, towards any human being. The last time I saw him, I perceived that the preceding year had done much to reduce his strength, but nothing to diminish the life and glow of his affections. I could see that he was looking at every thing in its relation to eternal interests. While he was cheerful and sometimes even playful, it was evident that the chariot in which he was to ascend was making ready for him, and that his preparation was fully made for

stepping into it. Dear, venerable old man! I left him with some faint hope of seeing him again; but before the time for my next visit came, the silver cord had been loosed, and the veteran saint had gone home!