

THE LIFE

OF

CHARLES HODGE D.D. LL.D.

PROFESSOR IN THE THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY  
PRINCETON N. J.

BY HIS SON

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## CHAPTER XV.

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DR. HODGE CONSIDERED AS A TEACHER, PREACHER, THEOLOGIAN AND CHRISTIAN MAN.

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I HAVE in the preceding chapters given the facts which constitute what remain to us in memory of the earthly life of the subject of this memoir. In this chapter will be presented a reflection of the image he cast in the several offices he filled on the minds of some of the most competent of his pupils and friends.

### I. DR. HODGE AS A TEACHER OF EXEGESIS.

BY THE REV. BENJAMIN B. WARFIELD, PROFESSOR OF THE WESTERN THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY, ALLEGHENY CITY, PA.

*Rev. A. A. Hodge* :—Remembering your request, I shall endeavor to write absolutely impartially the impressions made upon me as a student of your father's exegetical teaching. This is no easy matter, the danger being that like the skeptics I shall lean over backwards from the very effort not to lean forwards.

He taught exegesis only to the juniors, and although five years have elapsed, the impressions made at that time remain as vivid as though it were yesterday. His very mode of entering the room was characteristic. Infirm as he was, he was not *bent* by extreme age or infirmity; his carriage was erect and graceful, and his step always firm. The mantle that hung from his shoulders during the cooler months heightened the effect of graceful movement. I well remember that when he stepped into the aisle of the first church to welcome Drs. Dorner and Christlieb on their visit to Princeton, in the autumn of '73, I thought I had never witnessed a finer spectacle of strength

and grace combined. And yet it was but an example of his ordinary bearing; he gave me the same impression every time he entered the recitation room. After his always strikingly appropriate opening prayer had been offered, and we had been settled back into our seats, he would open his well thumbed Greek Testament—on which it was plain that there was not a single marginal note—look at the passage for a second, and then throwing his head back, and closing his eyes, begin his exposition. He scarcely again glanced at the Testament during the hour, the text was evidently before his mind, verbally, and the matter of his exposition thoroughly at his command. In an unbroken stream it flowed from subject to subject, simple, clear, cogent, unfailingly reverent. Now and then he would pause a moment to insert an illustrative anecdote—now and then lean forward suddenly with tearful, wide-open eyes, to press home a quick-risen inference of the love of God to lost sinners. But the web of his discourse—for a discourse it really was—was calm, critical and argumentative. We were expected to take notes upon it and recite on them at our next meeting. This recitation was, however, brief, covering not often more than a quarter of an hour; and we consequently felt that lecturing was the main thing.

This, then, was how he taught us exegesis. The material of the lectures resembled very much his printed commentaries. I thought then, and I think now, that Dr. Hodge's sense of the general meaning of a passage was unsurpassed. He had all of Calvin's sense of the flow and connection of thought. Consequently the analysis of passages was superb. Nothing could surpass the clearness with which he set forth the general argument and the main connections of thought. Neither could anything surpass the analytical subtlety with which he extracted the doctrinal contents of passages. I can never forget how bitingly clear his sentences often were, in which he set forth in few words the gist of a chapter. He seemed to look through a passage, catch its main drift and all its theological bearings, and state the result in crisp sentences, which would have been worthy of Bacon; all at a single movement of mind.

He had, however, no taste for the technicalities of Exegesis. He did not shrink from them in his lectures, indeed; but on such points he was seldom wholly satisfactory. His discussion of disputed grammatical or lexical points had a flavor of second-handedness about them. He appeared not to care to have a personal opinion upon such matters, but was content to accept another's without having made it really his own. He would state, in such cases, several views from various critical commentators, and then make choice between them; but I could not always feel that his choice was deter-

mined by sound linguistic principles. He sometimes seemed to be quite as apt to choose an indefensible as a plausible one—guided, apparently, sometimes by weight of name, sometimes by dislike to what seemed to him over-subtlety, and sometimes, it seemed, by theological predilection.

He made no claim, again, to critical acumen; and in questions of textual criticism he constantly went astray. Hence it was that often texts were quoted to support doctrines of which they did not treat; and a meaning was sometimes extracted from a passage which it was far from bearing. But this affected details only, the general flow of thought in a passage he never failed to grasp, and few men could equal him in stating it.

From what I have written you will see that Dr. Hodge commanded my respect and admiration as an exegete, while at the same time I could not fail to recognize that this was not his forte. Even here he was the clear, analytical thinker, rather than a patient collector and weigher of detailed evidence. He was great here, but not at his greatest. Theology was his first love.

I would like to say one word before the closing of my impressions of your father as a teacher, because I fear that in writing to you of other things most of your correspondents may neglect this. I have sat under many noted teachers, and yet am free to say that as an educator I consider Dr. Hodge superior to them all. He was in fact my ideal of a teacher. Best of all men I have ever known, he knew how to make a young man think. All the rote-learning that could be done could not secure a good recitation to him. One must have so learned a chapter of his theology, for instance, as to be able to apply all the principles laid down in it on need, in order to be able to recite to him at all. He had a way too of commencing his questioning away back of these principles, and by skillful interrogation gradually making the student evolve them for himself, so finely managing it that at last they would burst upon him as new and self-discovered facts; educed from his own thoughts. Thus they were made part of the permanent furniture of his mind—they were no longer acquired things borrowed for occasional use, *but his own*, "bone of his bone, and flesh of his flesh." After that he could as soon part with life as give them up.

I cannot hope either to describe this mode of teaching or express my profound admiration of it. I can only say that in that room of Systematic Theology, I think I had daily before me examples of perfect teaching. The way he managed his own accumulations of learning too—constantly drawing on them for illustration and enforcement, constantly the master of them, and of every detail of them,

was marvelous. We think that though learning is fuel to the mental fire, yet there is such a thing as smothering the flames with a superabundance of fuel. But "so intense and ardent was the fire of his mind that it was not only not suffocated beneath this weight of fuel, but penetrated the whole superabundant mass with its own heat and radiance." Every jot of that learning, consecrated to the Master's cause, was ready to be utilized in the recitation room. Every jot of it was Christianized by its passage through his mind from whatever source it was drawn. Had I never gained another thing at Princeton, I would bless God for permitting me to see this! *O si sic omnes!*

Believe me as ever, yours, etc.

BENJAMIN B. WARFIELD.

## II. DR. HODGE AS A TEACHER OF DIDACTIC THEOLOGY AND AS A PREACHER, BY DR. WM. M. PAXTON, OF NEW YORK.

### 1st. As a Teacher of Theology.

It gives me great pleasure to think of Dr. Charles Hodge, as I remember him when I was a student; and to mingle those early impressions with my riper judgment of his gifts and character, when in after life we were brought into more intimate relations.

I entered the Seminary at the time when he was recovering from a painful illness which confined him to his couch for a long period—during which the grace of God had wrought in him such a matured and happy Christian experience, that his face shone in brightness and beauty as if it had been the "face of an angel." This was noticed by all the students, and was the frequent occasion of remark. When he came into the class-room, still lame, leaning on a staff, and blushing like a bashful boy, our sympathy was excited—but when he took his seat upon the chair, the glance which he cast upon the class was one of such beaming benevolence mingled with such quiet peace that we all felt he had come in the spirit of the Apostle John, to teach us out of his own deep spiritual intuitions the mystery of the kingdom of God.