

1893

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VOLUME

THE

Published by the  
Students  
of

Hamden-Sidney  
College



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## Dr. John H. Rice.

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BY W. W. MOORE, D. D., LL. D.

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JOHN HOLT RICE, the founder of Union Theological Seminary, was born near New London, in Bedford County, Virginia, on the 28th of November, 1777. His father, Benjamin Rice, though an intelligent and popular man, a lawyer and deputy clerk of the court, and a ruling elder in the Presbyterian Church, had but little success in a worldly sense, and the home of the future theologian was one first of only moderate comfort and afterwards of downright poverty. His mother was a cultivated, amiable, and pious woman, sister of the Rev. John White Holt, a clergyman of the Church of England, for whom the subject of our sketch was named. John, the third of six children, was a very delicate infant, and at one time, when about two years of age, he was actually thought to be dying, so that he was "taken up out of his cradle and laid upon the bed to expire with more ease." His recovery was so surprising that his uncle, who with his mother stood watching him, declared that God must have some great work for the boy to do, charged his mother to train him up with that in view, and offered to assist her in giving him an education. His precocity as a student seemed to confirm his uncle's prediction. He manifested even in infancy that passion for books which distinguished him throughout his life. Before he was four years old he had read a considerable portion of the Bible and all of Watts' Psalms and Hymns. Another interesting proof of the proverb that "the boy is the father of the man" was afforded by his custom of gathering the other children, white and black, into a congregation, and conducting, with much solemnity, a religious service, doubtless in imitation of his clerical uncle. He seems to have experienced a change of heart in childhood, and to have given increasingly strong evidence of being a true disciple of Christ. When he was about twelve years of age he experienced the greatest sorrow of his

life, perhaps, in the death of his dear mother, an event which was followed by pathetic but salutary hardships. His father's circumstances became more and more straitened, and the eldest sister, Edith, to whom the chief care of the family now fell, had to do all the hard work of the house. This grieved John far more than any of his own privations and toils, and "to lighten her burden, he would often help her to milk the cows, wash the clothes, and scour and rub the floors." His father's second marriage only served to render the lot of the children harder than it was before, as their step-mother treated them with great rigor, John being the special victim of her harsh and jealous temper. When he came home from school at night, she would set him to "his regular task of picking cotton," and then send him up to bed without a candle. But the instinct of the scholar was strong within him, and while his step-mother thought he was fast asleep, he would be reading his Horace by the blaze of the light-wood which he had hidden away for this purpose, and when the light-wood gave out he would go on reading by the fire alone, bending over the book lying on the hearth, "till he would almost singe his hair in the act."

At fifteen years of age he made public confession of faith in Christ and was received into the full communion of the Church. About this time he spent a year and a half in Liberty Hall Academy (now Washington and Lee University). When his father could no longer afford to keep him at this institution and was about to bring him home, a young man named George A. Baxter, who was then teaching an academy near New London, sent him a generous invitation to come and pursue his studies with him. He came at once, and together these two kindred spirits trod the great highways of literature for a year and a half. It is hardly necessary to state that this discerning young teacher afterwards became pastor of the church at Lexington, then President of Washington College, and finally Professor of Theology in Union Seminary, thus becoming the successor of his former pupil.

In his eighteenth year young Rice obtained a position as teacher in the family of Mr. Nelson, a gentleman of wealth and cultivation, at Malvern Hill, below Richmond. Just before starting for his new home, he was one day introduced by his father in the court yard at Liberty, to Patrick Henry, with the words: "Here, Mr. Henry, is my young son, who is about to set out to try his fortune in the world." The great orator took him kindly by the hand

and told him to be of good courage, adding: "Be sure, my son, to remember that the best men always make themselves"—a sentence which, falling from such a man, made a deep impression upon his mind, says his biographer, "and often recurred to his recollection, to rally his resolution, and stimulate his diligence, when he found himself tempted to indulge his besetting sin of indolence." Shortly afterwards he set out for Malvern Hill, his whole outfit being \$1.75 and a handkerchief full of clothes. The young tutor won the favorable regard of all with whom he was brought into contact during his residence of eighteen months in this fashionable circle, but the gay and semi-skeptical society had an unhappy effect on his spiritual life, and for a time his heart was chilled with a strange coldness towards God and indifference towards his fellow-men. In returning home for a visit he travelled up the river in an open boat and, being exposed to the summer sun, fell ill of a fever which brought him to the brink of the grave. "But in this affliction of the body he experienced the healing of his soul."

On recovering from his double malady, of body and spirit, he began to cast about for employment, and chanced to see in a newspaper an advertisement for a tutor in Hampden-Sidney College. He at once set out on foot and walked the whole distance, more than seventy miles, to offer his services, but on his arrival he was mortified to learn that the position had already been offered to Rev. Robert Logan, of Finecastle, who, however, had not signified his acceptance of it. Mr. Rice immediately started again on foot, made the return journey of sixty or seventy miles, with only twelve and a-half cents to defray his expenses, saw Mr. Logan and obtained his answer to the trustees, declining their invitation, and then came once more to Hampden-Sidney, where he entered upon the duties of his well-earned position. This was in 1797. He was then nineteen years of age, tall, slender, sallow, "rather awkward in his carriage and very shabby in his dress." Moreover, he was depressed by the thought of a small debt which he had incurred while a student at Lexington and had not been able to pay. The College itself was in a low state, both as to funds and students. Such were the unpromising conditions under which he began his career on "the hill." But, through the warm and generous friendship of Major James Morton, of Willington, who advanced him the means to pay his debt and replaced his threadbare clothes with a more becoming suit, these external disadvantages were speedily over-

come, and it soon became evident that in this young tutor the College had made a most valuable acquisition. Shortly after his arrival the Rev. Archibald Alexander was elected to the presidency of the institution, and the Rev. Conrad Speece was associated with him in the work of instruction. These able and godly young ministers exercised a strong influence upon Mr. Rice, while they in turn received a distinct impression of his talents and spirit. Dr. Alexander informs us that at this time he was remarkable for (1) independence and careful deliberation in the formation and expression of his opinions. "He knew how to exercise that species of self denial, so difficult to most young men, of suspending his judgment on any subject until he should have the opportunity of contemplating it in all its relations." (2) Insatiable thirst for knowledge, united with a sound and discriminating judgment which prevented his vast accumulation of ideas from becoming an undigested, unwieldy and useless mass. (3) A fondness for and facility in the use of his pen. It was his habit to write something every day. (4) A distaste for metaphysical discussions. He was thoroughly practical, and, as a teacher, he was accurate and skillful.

In the spring of 1799 he resigned his position, at the request of Major Morton, and took charge of a small school of girls at Willington, one of whom was Anne, the daughter of his friend and host, and afterwards his wife. After a year here he went to Powhatan county for the purpose of studying medicine, but in the fall of 1800 he was induced by urgent invitations to resume his tutorship in the College, and shortly afterwards he gave himself to the service of God as a minister of the Gospel and began the study of theology under his friend and teacher, Dr. Alexander. He was licensed by Hanover Presbytery, September 12th, 1803. After preaching a year on probation in a missionary field covering parts of Prince Edward, Campbell and Charlotte counties, he was ordained and installed pastor of Cub Creek Church, where he remained for eight years.

In the autumn of 1811 the Presbyterians of Richmond, feeling that the time had come for the organization and equipment of an evangelical church of their faith in that city, invited Mr. Rice to become their pastor and leader in that important enterprise. In 1812, shortly after the appalling dispensation of Providence by which so many valuable lives were lost in the burning of the Richmond theatre, he moved to the capital, and on October 17th of the

same year effected the organization of the First Presbyterian Church of that city. Here he prosecuted a busy and fruitful pastorate for ten years.

In 1822 he was elected almost simultaneously to two positions of conspicuous honor and usefulness, viz: the presidency of Princeton College and the professorship of Theology in the seminary which it was proposed to establish near Hampden-Sidney College. After mature deliberation he declined the call to New Jersey, though at great pecuniary sacrifice, and accepted the appointment to the work in Prince Edward. He was then just recovering from a severe and protracted illness, and, with a view to recruiting his health, he made a journey by sea to New York, travelling thence to Saratoga Springs and other points, and improving the opportunity thus afforded to raise funds for the proposed seminary; and therefore did not reach Hampden-Sidney till the autumn (1823). Finding that no accommodations had yet been provided for him, he accepted the invitation of President Cushing of the College to lodge with him temporarily, and soon afterwards opened his school of the prophets with three students in one end of President Cushing's kitchen. On Thursday, January 1st, 1824, the Board of Trustees of the Theological Seminary met in the College church, and in the presence of a large congregation, the institution was formally opened, Dr. Rice was regularly installed as Professor, and delivered a discourse appropriate to the occasion, based upon II. Tim., 3: 16, 17.

There was no building as yet, nor even a site for one. Both, however, were speedily provided, thanks to the ability and enterprise of the indefatigable founder. Just south of the College grounds, distant scarcely an eighth of a mile, lay a handsome piece of woodland, rising from the road with a gentle ascent, and affording a most desirable location for the proposed edifice. There the site of Union Seminary was fixed. The place was already hallowed ground, for, as Dr. Rice learned after he had obtained it, it was the very spot to which the students of Hampden-Sidney College who had been awakened in the great revival under the preaching of the Rev. John Blair Smith, nearly half a century before, were accustomed to resort for secret and social prayer. Early in the summer of 1824, on the site sanctified by such memories, Dr. Rice laid off with his own hands the ground plot of what is now the eastern end of the Seminary building, and in 1825 it was finished. This building,

though ample at first, was soon outgrown by the increasing number of students, and had to be enlarged to its present dimensions.

We cannot follow in detail the history of those seven crowded years during which he created from almost nothing a large and well equipped theological seminary. This achievement itself is enough to show that the father of Union Seminary was an epoch-making man, wise, large-minded, loving, a scholar of rich and varied attainments, a prophet of clear and far-reaching vision, a man "that had understanding of the times, to know what Israel ought to do," a leader of extraordinary enterprise and skill in practical affairs. The institution began, as we have seen, without buildings or adequate equipment of any kind, but by his ability, energy and heroic faith, he carried it to speedy and splendid success, making it in an almost incredibly short time one of the leading theological schools of the country. Within seven years it had secured a library, ample buildings for lecture rooms, chapels, dormitories and residences, and had three instructors and nearly forty students.

In the south wall of the Seminary chapel is a chaste marble tablet, containing in gilt letters the following modest summary of his noble and fruitful life:

IN  
MEMORY OF  
REV. JOHN HOLT RICE, D. D.,  
BORN IN BEDFORD CO., VA., NOV. 28, 1777;  
TUTOR IN HAMPDEN-SIDNEY COLLEGE,  
1797—1804;  
PASTOR CUB CREEK CHURCH,  
1804—1812;  
PASTOR FIRST CHURCH, RICHMOND,  
1812—1823;  
PROFESSOR OF THEOLOGY IN  
UNION SEMINARY,  
1822 TO HIS DEATH, SEPT. 3, 1831.

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EMINENT AND EFFICIENT IN EVERY OFFICE,  
THIS SEMINARY, FOUNDED BY HIS LABORS,  
IS HIS LASTING  
MONUMENT.