

YOUNG MEN WHO OVERCAME

By *ROBERT E. SPEER*



To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne. *Rev. III, 21.*



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CORTLANDT VAN RENSSELAER HODGE

A PRINCETON MARTYR

THE roll of martyrs contains many names of men and women of high and noble character, but those who knew Rensselaer Hodge and his wife are sure that there have never been martyrs whose character could have been more beautiful or sincere than theirs. Each age has its own type, and the great Christians of one time display a different emphasis and proportion from the Christians of another time, but in what is essential and eternally worthy, the true Christians of all times are alike. From their childhood and in all their lives before they were married and went out to China and afterwards, Rensselaer Hodge and Elsie Sinclair showed forth the qualities of perfect purity, gentleness, and strength, which we owe to Christ and see in all Christlikeness.

He was born in Burlington, New Jersey, July first, 1872. When he was less than a year old and his life seemed to hang by a thread in a serious illness, the skill of his uncle, Dr. H. Lenox Hodge, one of the foremost physicians in Philadelphia, suggested treatment which restored him to health. He grew up under the richest Christian influence in a true Christian home, where the children were taught that they were born in the Church, that Christ was their Saviour, that God was their heavenly Father, and that they were always to think of the Saviour and Father as theirs to love, and to obey. The boy never thought of himself as outside the fold of the Shepherd, to be some day sought and brought in. His father early suggested to him that he might have the privilege of coming to the Lord's Table, and the idea was welcomed with eagerness. In his letter to the Presbyterian Board of Foreign Missions, offering himself for work in China, Rensselaer recalls the quiet way in which he grew up into the Christian faith:

“So far as my religious history goes, it

is soon told. Born of earnest, God-fearing parents, from my earliest childhood I have been taught the Bible, the Shorter Catechism, and the great doctrines of our faith, and I can, in fact, truly say that, so long as I can remember, I have believed on our Lord Jesus Christ. As soon as I came to years of discretion I made a public confession of my faith, and I have tried to walk according to it ever since."

Modestly thinking that he did not have the gift for public address, he felt that he should not enter the ministry, which he would have loved to do, and he chose as the work for which he was fitted the study of medicine and the life of a missionary. How he came to this purpose, he explained to the Board. In answer to the question, "How long have you entertained the desire to become a foreign missionary?" he replied: "Ever since I was old enough to think about my life-work." And he wrote more at length:

"I have thought about this matter a great deal. I have prayed about it, and ever since I have given my thought as to what I should do

‘when I grow up,’ I have determined, if God were willing, that I would be a foreign missionary. It is no sudden impulse on my part, but the result of years of thought and prayer. In fact, all through my studies at college and in the medical school, I have kept this one thought in mind, and now, as the time draws near, I am anxiously watching for the way to be opened.”

And again, in answer to further inquiry:

“My motive for desiring to enter the foreign missionary work is simply that it has seemed to me from the very beginning that God wished me to go there. I have believed always that one should go where he can do the most in God’s service, and it has always seemed to me that I could accomplish most for him as a foreign missionary. It was with this thought in mind that I started my study of medicine, and I have always only grown more determined to go, if it is God’s will, as the time draws near.”

In preparation for his life-work he entered Princeton College in the fall of 1889 with the

class of 1893. He led in college the same blameless life which he had lived as a boy, and when he offered himself later to the Board, one of his teachers, a man of careful speech, not given to over-praise, wrote:

“I have been teaching thirteen years in Princeton, and must have had nearly two thousand young men in my classes during that time. Dr. Hodge is the one for whom I feel the greatest personal affection. His class (1893) was more scholarly than the average. I think he graduated third in rank. There have been only a few under my instruction whose scholarship has been as thorough and accurate as his; only one or two in whom it has been characterized by as much refinement and good taste. It seems very superfluous to recommend him. You are getting a very rare young man.”

After leaving Princeton he went to the University of Pennsylvania for his medical course, and then took a hospital appointment in the Presbyterian Hospital in Philadelphia. What he was in himself, he appeared to others—a Christian man and a gentleman. The Dean of

the Medical School wrote of him to the Missionary Board:

“I have been personally acquainted with Cortlandt Van R. Hodge since the time he entered the University of Pennsylvania as a student of medicine. During the entire period of his course at the university his scholastic standing was excellent, and on graduation he was considered by his instructors as one of the best equipped men in his class. Since graduation he has had service in a hospital, which, of course, has contributed to his practical knowledge of the treatment of the sick. He is a thoroughly straightforward, energetic young man—a gentleman in every respect.”

There is a common notion among many young men that no young man can live a flawless life; that every life has its lapses and its stains; that some conceal them and some recover from them, but that there are only spotted men and Pharisees. And there is another common notion that, when a young man does live a stainless life, he must be a man incapable of its common pleasures and joys. There are hun-

dreds of young men whose lives correct these errors. Rensselaer Hodge was their utter refutation.

No life could have been more filled with wholesome, quiet joy than his.

It was one of those rounded, complete lives in which no distorted virtues stood out obtrusively; not filled with erratic or exceptional experiences, but "steadfast and still." One of his classmates, Mr. James S. Rogers, of Philadelphia, writes in reply to an inquiry as to such incidents as might illustrate his character:

"The truth is that I have been unable to remember, or, by inquiries among a few who knew him best, learn or be reminded of many incidents which stand out as especially indicative of his character. It was the inherent force of Christian character uniformly present in all that he did which gave him power, rather than particular acts of a striking nature. He was also such a well-rounded man, courageous to the suffering of a martyr's death, yet sweet and tender almost as a woman; strong to the strong, his presence a cheer; a hard and consistent

worker, yet welcoming healthy pleasures; so well-rounded, in fact, and evenly balanced, that no qualities or powers were abnormally developed, so that we can seize on any and say these above others differentiated him from other men. Both his character and his life stood out rather, each as an harmonious whole, grand in its simplicity. Of the component parts blended into the symmetry of the whole man, several may, however, be especially mentioned. First, his sympathy. It was broad and catholic toward all men. That God had breathed His spirit into men entitled all of them to sympathy, help, and love. And so in daily life, and in the doings of young and old, in their customs, labors, pleasures, friendships, and relationships, all that was good, clean, manly or womanly, and healthy, found in Hodge a responsive chord, which caused his life to vibrate in harmony with the lives round him. It is one of the great reasons for the force of his life and character that he always attracted others by his sympathy, and repelled none by unfeeling condemnation, cold, self-proud righteousness, austerity, or a 'holier-than-thou' attitude. The

result was that in college even those who led a very different life from his respected his character and were warmly friendly to him personally. This was markedly demonstrated by the letters of appreciation of Hodge, and contributions to the memorial tablet, sent at that time by men of all kinds in the class.

“Did anyone in any way entitled to be called his neighbor, or a friend, suffer by way of bereavement, misfortune, or sickness, or physical hurt, his sympathy was extended so genuinely, because it was genuine, as to be an honest comfort to the comforted, a sustaining hand restoring self-sustaining strength. As an instance of the latter, there occurred, upon one occasion when a scrub baseball team of his class on which he played was playing a challenge game with the ‘Prep. School’ team, a fight between two boys about ten or eleven years of age. As they were not fighting over any principle, those nearest, of whom Hodge was one, went and separated them. That sufficed for all the rest of us; but Hodge saw that one of them, smaller than the other, had been hurt somewhat, his nose bleeding and tears flowing. So he took

the youngster under his wing, used his own handkerchief to dry the boy's face of both blood and tears, and in a few minutes and with a few kindly but manly words had the boy restored to peace of mind. It was only a matter of a few minutes, and we then went on with the game, but its significance lay in the fact that, while the others only stopped the fight, he sympathized with and cheered up the boy who was hurt.

“Children knew at once that he was their friend. They seldom showed that hesitancy which so often acts as a barrier to an older person; but ‘made friends’ with him at once. He was very tactful in getting them interested in stories, and I can remember his telling Uncle Remus's Bre'r Rabbit stories to children with great effect.

“Second, may be mentioned his love of good. This exercised a guiding influence on his life as strong, perhaps, as anything else. Love of good, I mean, as distinct from condemnation of evil. It seems to me that while evil must be overthrown, yet the upbuilding of good is the most constructive work. I do not think it was

so much a worked-out theory or belief in this as a natural love for the good which turned Hodge in this direction. But certain it is that he sought for the good in others, builded upon good, and his whole influence was constructive. This was doubtless another reason why he was able to influence men without alienating them. This characteristic caused him to be more especially identified with movements or organizations promoting active good. Thus in college he was strongly in support of the introduction of the honor system in examinations. This fortunate result was accomplished in our senior year. And, though it was the result of a general agitation of the subject rather than individual action, yet without the backing of strong men such as Hodge, who were known to stand for manliness and right without finicalness or girlishness, it must have failed. Such men are towers of strength to such a movement, and there can be no doubt that Hodge's advocacy of the honor system aided greatly in its introduction; still less doubt that the sure knowledge that he and others would not endure the company of men who violated their honor had much

to do with establishing it and making it a practical success. He was a man in whose sight one did not like to do wrong.

“His modesty also deserves especial mention. I would not do him the injustice of saying that he was not grateful for appreciation, but extended praise was not to his liking. If he did admirable things, he did them genuinely for themselves, because they were worth doing, not for the applause they might bring.

“This leads me to consider the element of genuineness in his nature. He acted true to himself. He did not try to act other people’s feeling or tastes or character; nor did he act for opinions, knowing that if his acts were right, opinions would take care of themselves. The consequence was that you felt the force of genuineness in his presence. It did not simply flow from his words, or merely follow from his acts; it was felt.

“There was a similar strength lying back of his gentleness which also was felt rather than seen. Gentleness was notably characteristic of him, but you knew it was the gentleness of power controlled. He could strike, but he did

not need to. He exercised more control by the strength of his gentleness than do the rough by force. A healthy temperament added to the evenness of his development above referred to. Essentially of a serious nature, he yet had a brightness and cheer of disposition, a love for proper recreation, which kept him from becoming saddened in his own heart or tiresome to others.

“He could see the humor of things, and keep in touch and harmony with humanity, its joys and pleasures as well as its sorrows. He was very fond of baseball, and played a great deal, usually covering first base, where he did consistent good work. In football season he also played in scrub games, but not so frequently as in baseball. Being of good size and strength, he generally played in the line; usually at tackle. He also played a good game of tennis, swam, and skated as well as, or better than, the average of us. When he went into games, he played to win, but to win fairly.

“He may have had to struggle against evil tendencies in his earlier days, but he succeeded in so subordinating them that it seemed to have

become the natural expression of himself to be a Christian man."

From his boyhood he had been a Christian worker. Missionary work with him was no romantic dream or purpose of future service. There are those who compound with conscience for present neglect of common duty by splendid purpose of performance of future uncommon duty. But, as none but common duties ever come to us, every uncommon duty becoming common when it appears, the service of the procrastinator is always a prospective service. There was none of this in Rensselaer Hodge. He lived for God and the good of men in his present time—the only time that he had.

"As to my experience in active Christian service," he told the Board, "it is as follows: As soon as I was old enough to have a class in Sunday school, I started to teach in our Mission School in East Burlington, New Jersey. I taught here until I left for college in Princeton, New Jersey. Here I taught, I believe for two years, in a mission school at Queenstown, and then for two years attended a Bible class in the

First Church Sunday school. During a revival of religious interest in college during my senior year (I think it was), I tried to take an active part in the work. During my course of study at the medical school I taught and superintended a mission school among the Italians and Syrians round Ninth and Carpenter streets for some time, and then taught in the Woodland Sunday school until I was obliged to give this up on account of my duties here at the hospital."

His hospital work was true Christian work.

"In the Presbyterian Hospital," says his father, "he had to be brought into relation with all its many interests, the patients in the wards, the patients in the private rooms, the nurses, those on probation, and those accepted, fellow-residents, and the visiting physicians and surgeons, the men in the office, the chaplain, and others interested in the religious services, and the ladies of the Hospital Aid Society. In all these relations he seems to have acted with rare discretion, and I have reason to know that he was of substantial help in spiritual matters to

those who came under his influence. He had great sympathy with the nurses and did not like to see them overburdened, giving personal attention to measures for their relief. Wrong-doing excited his indignation, but he had patient regard for those who went astray, and he gave thought and care to the task of leading back to the right way."

He and Miss Sinclair, who was a graduate of Bryn Mawr, were appointed as missionaries in January, 1899, were married on February fourteenth, and sailed for China in April. No one could well enter upon the work better prepared.

Dr. and Mrs. Hodge went at once to their station at Paotingfu, China, where he was to have during his novitiate the invaluable help of the advice and association of Dr. George Yardley Taylor, a graduate of Princeton in the class of 1882, and a member of the Burlington church under the pastorate of Rensselaer's father. The first work, of course, was the language. But in November Dr. Hodge was far enough along to go off on a long trip southward with Mr. Lowrie and Mr. Killie, for the

purpose of selecting a site for a new mission station, which was only made possible by the re-establishment of order in China after the Boxer troubles, on one hand, and, on the other, the generosity of the Fifth Avenue Presbyterian Church in New York, which had undertaken as an extra contribution to provide the entire expense of the new station. Dr. Hodge was not to see it occupied. He had, however, the great satisfaction of learning of his appointment as physician in charge of the medical work of the Mission in the city of Peking. Everything hitherto had been but preparatory to this. He had now reached the goal to attain which so many years of toil and training had been given. The last letter received from his hands began: "Dear father, such wonderful news!" Then he goes on to tell of the appointment, and of his prompt visit to Peking with Mrs. Hodge to make arrangements to assume the duties of his post. Immediately after their return to Paotingfu, in the spring of 1900, the tempest of the Boxer uprising broke over China, and the little company at that station perished in the storm. On Saturday afternoon, June thirtieth, the Boxers

made the attack on the Presbyterian compound. Dr. and Mrs. Hodge and Dr. Taylor had gone to the home of Mr. and Mrs. Simcox, and there, with the three little Simcox children, all passed on together out of great tribulation into the presence of the Saviour whom they had unfalteringly served.

Just two years later the classes of 1882 and 1893 presented to Princeton University a tablet commemorative of Dr. Taylor and Dr. Hodge, and it was set in the wall of Marquand Chapel. In presenting the tablet in behalf of the class of 1893, Mr. Rogers told of a remark of a little child, who, when its mother was explaining the story of Jesus one day, and telling how loving and kind and helpful He was, exclaimed, "Mother, I know what Jesus was like—He was like Van Rensselaer!" And in accepting the tablet in behalf of the university, President Patton replied:

"One by one, by window and by mural tablet, we are adding to those visible memorials of the services of the sons of Princeton University which enrich, and give enhanced solemnity to,

this house of worship. And I can say, in all the solemnity that becomes the moment, that no names are more worthy than those which are added this morning to the increasing roll of Princeton's Christian martyrs. These men represent what we hope will ever be the spirit of the teaching of Princeton University. They were men, Christian men, hesitating at no step which pointed to duty.

“I accept, in the name of the Trustees, this tablet in grateful appreciation of their lives and services, with the hope that coming generations of undergraduates may find in it an inspiration to go out likewise in the service of their Lord.”

But the inspiration of such a life is not the possession of any one university. It belongs to every young man. It calls to every boy. Who can refuse to rise up and try to live for himself such a glorious life?