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ANNALS

OF THE

AMERICAN PULPIT;

OR

COMMEMORATIVE NOTICES

OF

DISTINGUISHED AMERICAN CLERGYMEN

OF

VARIOUS DENOMINATIONS,

FROM THE EARLY SETTLEMENT OF THE COUNTRY TO THE CLOSE OF THE YEAR
EIGHTEEN HUNDRED AND FIFTY-FIVE.

WITH HISTORICAL INTRODUCTIONS.

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BY WILLIAM B. SPRAGUE, D. D.

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VOLUME IV.
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NEW YORK:
ROBERT CARTER & BROTHERS,
530 BROADWAY.
1858.

Entered according to Act of Congress, in the year 1856.

By ROBERT CARTER & BROTHERS,

In the Clerk's Office of the District Court of the United States for the Southern
District of New York.

JOHN BLAIR HOGE.*

1810—1826.

JOHN BLAIR HOGE, a son of the Rev. Moses Hoge, D. D., was born in Jefferson County, Va., in April, 1790. He obtained the rudiments of his education in his father's house, and chiefly by instruction from young men who were prosecuting theological studies under his father's direction. He was for two years a pupil of his brother James, (now the Rev. Dr. Hoge of Columbus, O.,) in a classical school which he taught at Augusta Church, of which the Rev. Dr. Speece was afterwards Pastor. After this, he assisted his father for some time in a school which he had established at Shepherds-town, meanwhile pursuing his own studies; and then entered Hampden Sidney College, at an advanced standing, where he graduated about the year 1808. He afterwards became a Tutor in the College, his father having in the mean time become its President.

On resigning his place at Hampden Sidney, he commenced the study of the Law under the instruction of Henry E. Watkins, of Prince Edward County, and he mastered its principles with such facility, and evinced in so high a degree the faculty of generalization, that there was every prospect of his early becoming eminent in the profession. On mature reflection, however, he determined to abandon both the study of the Law and the prospect of its practice, and prepare himself for the Gospel ministry. He accordingly placed himself under his father's care, as a student of Theology, and on the 20th of April, 1810, was licensed by the Hanover Presbytery to preach the Gospel. In 1811, he was transferred to the Winchester Presbytery; and, having accepted a call from the Congregations of Tuscarora and Falling Waters, was ordained and installed at the Tuscarora meeting-house, on the 12th of October of the same year. A portion of his labours also was given to Martinsburg.

From his first appearance in the pulpit his preaching attracted great attention. With uncommon power of analysis, an exuberant imagination, a highly cultivated taste, and a susceptibility of deep and strong emotion, he held his audience almost as by a charm, and the educated and the uneducated alike rendered their testimony to the power of his eloquence. But, at no distant period, his constitution, naturally by no means robust, began to sink under his labours, and he found it necessary to devote some time to relaxation; and, in doing so, he determined to avail himself also of a still more genial climate. He accordingly directed his course across the ocean, and stopped for some time in the South of France, with manifest advantage to his health. He left home in the autumn of 1814, and returned in the summer of 1816, greatly delighted, and in various ways benefitted, by his tour. He was now even more sought after as a preacher than he had ever been before; but his popularity never seemed to occasion the least self-exaltation.

When the Church on Shockoe Hill, Richmond, was prepared for the Presbyterians who were gathered by the Rev. John D. Blair, Mr. Hoge was

* Foote's Sketches of Va.—MSS. from Rev. James Hoge, D. D., and Rev. D. H. Riddle, D. D.

invited to become their Pastor. He was accordingly released from the pastoral charge of Falling Waters on the 19th of April, 1822, and of Tuscarora, on the 19th of June following; and was transferred to the Hanover Presbytery on the 7th of the ensuing September. In this new field his usefulness was enlarged, and his health, for a time, seemed to be improved. But it was not long before it became apparent that his life was drawing to a close. In 1824, he began to suffer seriously from an affection of the liver; and though, after a few months, he was partially relieved, the disease recurred in a more aggravated form in August, 1825, and very soon run into a dropsy which terminated his life on the 31st of March, 1826. After it became manifest to his friends that his earthly labours were closed, he retired to Gerardstown, about eight miles from Martinsburg, to the house of a Mr. Wilson, who had formerly been an elder in one of his Churches, and there, after lingering several months, a most edifying example of Christian faith and hope, he entered into the joy of his Lord. His remains were removed to Martinsburg for burial; and there he sleeps surrounded by many who once enjoyed the benefit of his ministrations.

On the 6th of May, 1819, he was united in marriage to Ann K. Hunter of Martinsburg, Va. They had two children, who were quite young at the time of their father's death.

FROM MRS. DR. JOHN H. RICE.

NEAR HAMPDEN SIDNEY COLLEGE, May 4, 1854.

My dear Sir: My recollections of the Rev. John Blair Hoge reach back to his boyhood. I knew him when he first came to College, and knew him ever after, until death terminated his brilliant and useful career. He was our neighbour during part of the time of our residence in Richmond, and our relations with him were always most intimate and affectionate.

You could scarcely have met him in the most casual way, without being struck with his personal appearance. He was of a tall, slender and remarkably graceful form, and had a pale, comely,—I might almost say handsome, face, in which the lines of intelligence were deeply drawn. His manners were worthy of the court,—combining both dignity and suavity in the highest degree. And while they evidently showed the workings of a fine, benevolent spirit, they showed also a high degree of cultivation—they were what you would expect to find only in one who had always been accustomed to the most polished society.

Mr. Hoge's intellect was universally acknowledged to be of a high order—it was at once quick, delicate and penetrating. He was an indefatigable student, never satisfied unless he was adding something to his varied stores of knowledge. In the pulpit he possessed very uncommon attractions. I cannot say that he had the advantage of a very good voice—for, as I remember it, it was slightly inclined to be husky; but still, by a dexterous management of it, he could produce a very considerable effect upon his audience. His manner in the pulpit, though evincing great care and culture, was simple and natural; and it was earnest without any extraordinary vehemence. His gesture was not very abundant, but it was appropriate and effective. His discourses were carefully prepared, full of weighty, impressive thought, and pervaded by a tone of deep evangelical feeling, that was well fitted to open a passage to the heart. You felt not only that all that he said was vastly important, but that he himself fully realized its importance, and spoke under a deep impression of the solemnity of his vocation as an ambassador of Christ.

In his private intercourse, Mr. Hoge was a model of all that is gentle, discreet and exemplary. He was sometimes thought to be somewhat reserved; but

I am sure he was never so with his intimate friends, and I doubt whether he was so at all, beyond what a due regard to circumstances, in connection with his own ministerial dignity, would require. He was, undoubtedly, a very modest man; and no one could ever attribute to him the semblance of ostentation. This trait was particularly illustrated in his appearance in Presbyteries and other public bodies; while yet he never hesitated to speak when he felt called upon to do so; and he never expressed an opinion which did not receive a respectful consideration. I ought to add that he kept entirely aloof from the gay world, and, by example as well as precept, constantly urged the importance of a high standard of Christian character.

When Mr. Hoge returned from Europe, where he had been for the benefit of his health, he arrived at Philadelphia during the sessions of the General Assembly, where I happened myself, at that time, to be. There he found many of his friends, and from all met a most cordial welcome. When we left Philadelphia, on our homeward way, Dr. Alexander, who was then a settled pastor there, accompanied us as far as Newcastle; and, by the urgent request of the Captain and all the passengers, consented to favour us with a sermon on board the boat. After we had reached the Potomac, and several of our friends had come up to meet us, Mr. Hoge being on board, it was proposed by some of the passengers that a sermon should be requested from *him* also; but when it was suggested to him, he declined on the ground that there were many worldly people on board to whom such a service would be unwelcome; and he did not think it best to obtrude a religious exercise upon them contrary to their wishes. He was reminded that they practised their various amusements on board, without any respect to the feelings of Christians; but his reply was—"the people of the world do not expect to bring Christians over to their maxims and practices, and therefore have no interest in attempting to conciliate them; but we are deeply interested to conciliate the world to Christian views and practice, and therefore we ought to be careful, and do nothing needlessly to awaken their opposition, and thus paralyze our own good influence." This incident may stand in the place of many others, illustrative of his fine sense of Christian propriety.

Most affectionately and respectfully,

ANNE S. RICE.

FROM THE REV. D. H. RIDDLE, D. D.

JERSEY CITY, N. J., July 8, 1857.

Rev. and dear Sir: It would afford me great pleasure to contribute, in any degree, to set the character and excellencies of the Rev. J. B. Hoge in a proper light before the Church through your pages. This would only, indeed, be paying, in part, a debt of gratitude to the benefactor of my youth,—my early guide, who, under God, gave direction to my earthly, possibly my eternal, destiny. He was the pastor of my honoured father, the friend and counsellor of my widowed mother, the first minister I knew and loved. He was, for many years, an inmate of our household, and conducted its devotions.

J. B. Hoge was one of the most gifted sons of old Virginia. He was the descendant of a genuine Scotch Irish stock, was born within ten miles of my native place, spent the most of his ministerial life in my native county, and lies buried in the old grave-yard of Norbourne parish. The highest honours of his native State were within his reach, if he had lived to himself, and followed the promptings of his early ambition. His talents, taste, and acquirements, were acknowledged by all who knew him intimately to be of the first order. He was a worthy son of an honoured sire, (Dr. Moses Hoge,) whom John Randolph pronounced "the most eloquent man in Virginia." His ministry began early, and ended, to human vision, prematurely, embracing only about sixteen years.