

OBITUARY NOTICE for REV. JOHN G. RICHARDS

From the Presbyterian Standard

for October 14, 1914

John Gardiner Richards, son of Stephen Malone and Jane Lisle Gardiner Richards, was born near Huntsville, Ala., where his father was a respected and successful planter, March 31, 1828, being the eldest of eleven children, of whom he was the last survivor. When he was a boy in his teens he accepted Christ as his Savior, but his father being a Methodist and his mother a Presbyterian, he was for a year in doubt as to which church to join. After carefully reading the Confession of Faith and such literature as he could obtain setting forth the Methodist doctrine and policy, he decided that his mother's church was the nearer Scriptural, and united with Ebenezer Church, North Alabama Presbytery. After studying at home under Rev. Mr. Penland, and at Mt. Zion, in Tennessee, where David R. Arnold conducted his school in the colony that had come from Williamsburg, S. C., he entered Oglethorpe University from which, in three years, he was graduated in 1850. In 1853 he was graduated from the Theological Seminary at Columbia, S. C., of which he became a director for twenty-five years and was, perhaps, its oldest alumnus at the time of his death. North Alabama Presbytery licensed him to preach the Gospel in 1852, and after his graduation the following year, he entered at once upon the duties of supply in the Central (now Westminister) Church, Charleston, S. C., in the absence of its pastor, Dr. Daner. After serving here for six months he was offered the co-pastorate with Dr. Daner, and at the same time was called to Ebenezer Church, in Bethel Presbytery. This call he accepted and was installed at Ebenezer in 1854. This his first pastorate lasted for only four years, but during that time large additions were made to the membership of the church, as many as forty persons uniting with it on one occasion. While at Ebenezer he preached the first sermon ever preached at Rock Hill, S. C., then a tiny village of four or five families. In 1858 he was called to Liberty Hill, S. C. This call he accepted and continued pastor of that church for nearly thirty years, much of the time serving also the old Bethel or Beaver Creek church. In 1886 he accepted a repeated call to evangelistic labors in Harmony Presbytery, though his pastoral relation with Liberty Hill was not dissolved until the following year. For six years he labored as evangelist in all parts of that large district now covered by Pee Dee and Harmony Presbyteries. He organized ten churches and received a large number of persons into the Presbyterian church. After the Presbytery was divided he became pastor of Blenheim, Reedy Creek, and Dunbar churches, in the Pee Dee part of it, in 1893. When he had served these churches for seventeen years, the increasing infirmities of age, constrained him to lay aside the active duties of the ministry and, after four years of quiet, but by no means unuseful life, he entered into rest with his Savior from the home of his daughter, Mrs. J. E. Hunter, Blehheim, S. C., June 12, 1914. On February 1, 1855, he was married to Miss Sophia Edwards Smith, niece and protegee of the late Francis Marion

Robertson, M.D., of Charleston, S. C. To them were born eleven children, of whom nine lived to be grown, and the following survive: Mrs. F. J. Hay, Maj. John G. and Capt. Norman S. Richards, Liberty Hill, S. C.; Mrs. J. E. Hunter, Blenheim, S. C.; Rev. Charles M. Richards, D.D., Davidson, N. C.; Mr. Lewis P. Richards, Rowland, N. C.; and Mrs. D. A. McCallum, Hamer, S. C. In addition to their own large family, this devoted couple had in their home at different times as many as eight orphans whom they assisted in raising and educating. After the death of his first wife, Mr. Richards married Miss Sarah N. Matheson, of Blenheim, S. C., who also preceded him in death by several years.

At the outbreak of the Civil War, Mr. Richards volunteered as a private and joined the company of which Mr. Mack Steele, of Rock Hill, S. C., was captain, and was with his company at Pocotaligo when he was appointed chaplain, in which capacity he served throughout the war, first with the Tenth and later with the consolidated Tenth and Ninth S. C. Infantry. Returning to his home at the close of the war, he found Liberty Hill, directly in the wake of Sherman's destructive march, in the greatest destitution; his own wife and young children at one time reduced to the necessity of gathering grains of corn from the ground where the Northern soldiers had fed their horses, and parching them for food. It was very largely through his energy and his influence with his former kind parishoners at Ebenezer that the necessities of the community were supplied for the following months, until the year's harvest, Providentially bountiful and early, relieved the destitution. With the one horse left in the community, and that one escaping only because Mr. Richards had been riding it in the army, he set out for Ebenezer where the kind people, led by the late Peter Garrison and W. P. Thomason, furnished him a four-mule team and all of the provisions that they could draw. Through a region infested with marauders and stragglers he succeeded in getting back to Liberty Hill in safety where, with great rejoicing the provisions were apportioned out to the different families. The subscription to his salary that first year after the war as made to the deacons, is still extant and is a remarkable document as indicating the deep penury into which that community, until the war said to be the richest of its size in the State, was plunged. It is noted at the end of the year that a few dollars in cash had been paid by one family, but no money had been promised. The subscriptions were all in hay, corn, peas, syrup, and the like; while, evidencing the wonderful change since then in all matters connected with the temperance cause, it may be mentioned that two persons made their subscriptions payable in brandy, presumably peach, one promising one and the other two gallons of that delightful but highly intoxicating preparation. Very shortly after the war Mr. Richards had numerous calls to other fields, both within and without the State, any of which, had he accepted it, would have brought him into greater prominence in the church, but he elected to stay with the people in their financial and industrial prostration, who in their wealth had treated him with the utmost

liberality. The needs of that period following the great desolation wrought by Sherman, and the pressing necessities of a young man and growing family, led him to engage in planting and to use his credit in establishing a mercantile business, which was the greatest help to the residents of that vicinity. Under able management both his planting and mercantile interests grew to large proportions, and because they were less easily laid aside than assumed, it came about that he continued longer in them than either his friends or he himself would have had him do. In all his business dealings it is true, as far as known at least, that he never sacrificed a friendship or lost his influence for good with any man; while his faithfulness in preparation and preaching was such that a college-bred man who grew up and continued long under his ministry, says, "I have never heard him preach a poor sermon." His faithfulness as a pastor and the blessing of God on his labors may be judged from the fact that there were but five adult persons in the community not members of the church when he left Liberty Hill, where there is only the Presbyterian Church, and all of these professed Christ while his influence was still a potent factor in the congregation; and from that church under his ministry went seventeen men to become elders and deacons in other places. His interest in and work for the colored people during all of his ministry, but especially that part spent at Liberty Hill, are worthy of more extended notice than can here be given them. Many of the slaves were members of his church, and after their emancipation the first Presbyterian Church organized among the ex-slaves was composed of some of his membership, and he gave himself diligently to the work of influencing and preparing promising men of that race to preach to their fellows. He trained four of these colored preachers, one of them the first colored preacher ordained by our church after the war. The affection of the colored citizens of Liberty Hill for him to the end of his life was something beautiful to see in a day when the two races were forgetting the ties that once bound them to one another.

Mr. Richards, by the necessities of the time and circumstances under which he lived, was a student rather of men and affairs than of literature. His mind was of no mean calibre: quick, strong, comprehensive, and tenacious. Always his strong and logical intellect was busily gathering and coordinating the facts of contemporaneous history. His interest in life, men and their doings, and his enjoyment of it, was without comparison, the keenest the writer has ever known, and it kept him young when fourscore years of age. His views on matters of Church or State were notable for their saneness, and his judgment of men and affairs rarely at fault. He was too modest and quiet to assert himself, but all who ever associated with him in any judicatory, attest his great value as a presbyter, and all who ever heard him know his excellence as a preacher. He was a member of the last Assembly held at Rochester, N. Y., just before its division into Northern and Southern, and three times afterwards he sat in the supreme court of his church.

His own Synod honored him with election to the moderator's chair, and with many appointments of honor and trust. His piety was of the quiet, unostentatious kind. The phrases of religion were seldom on his lips, but his life was none the less dominated by it; and in that life, as in his preaching, there were always the sweetness and the strength that flow from a strong, controlled spirit, joyfully subject to one Master, even Christ.

Among his children and children-in-law, grand-children, and great grand-children, eighty-six in all, those who have come to years of discretion are, with one exception, members of the church on confession of Christ. (That one made his confession of Christ some time after Mr. Richards' death.) Among his nine sons and sons-in-law are five ruling elders and one deacon, and among his sons and mature grandsons are three ministers and one candidate for the ministry.* All these bear witness to the wonderful influence of his life and teaching. Few men ever had the gift of winning confidence so easily as he did or of binding friendship and love to himself; and none more certainly used these gracious gifts in influencing others toward the noble and true and good. So that to the number of his own household, there is a great company of others to be added who heard and saw in him the Word of Christ and by him learned wisdom.

"They that be teachers shall shine as the brightness of the firmament and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars forever and ever."

* see ADDENDUM, Page