

Biography of the Class of 1838 of the College of New Jersey at Princeton, N.J.

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REV. ABNER ADDISON PORTER, A.M., D.D.

ABNER ADDISON PORTER, son of the Rev. Francis Hamilton Porter and Mrs. Isabella (Kilpatrick) Porter, was born October 12, 1817, at Asheville, N. C. He belonged to a family of ministers. His father, his maternal grandfather, his two maternal uncles and his three brothers all being Presbyterian ministers. While he was yet a child, his father removed to Alabama, and established a classical school at Selma, in that State. In this school the youthful Abner as-

sisted his father until his own preparations for college were completed, even at that early age displaying such mental vigor, intellectual growth and moral excellence as gave rare promise of future eminence and usefulness.

He entered the Sophomore Class in the College of New Jersey, in 1835, and the Whig Society. In form he was tall and slender; in manners grave, sedate, modest and diffident. He was a model of regularity and punctuality, and unsurpassed in diligent attention to every study and to every duty of his class. His recitations were almost invariably perfect. At his graduation he was fourth in rank among seventy-five, the three who were above him being above by a very small fraction. He was also an excellent speaker, having a clear voice, a fine style, an earnest, graceful and impressive delivery. At the graduation of the class he delivered the Valedictory, and an unusually fine one it was. He was always held in unbounded respect and esteem by his fellow-students.

On leaving college, Mr. Porter returned to Alabama and spent about a year in teaching, after which he entered the Theological Seminary at Columbia, S. C., passed through a full three years course of study, and was graduated in 1842. He was licensed to preach by the Presbytery of Tuscaloosa (Ala.) Oct. 15, 1842, and having accepted calls to become pastor of the two churches of Bethsalem and Burton's Hill, in that presbytery, was ordained and installed over them, Nov. 19, 1843. He labored in this field until 1847, when he was removed to Charleston and became Assistant Pastor (with Rev. Thomas Smythe, D. D.), of the Second Presbyterian Church in that city. But soon after, in May, 1847, the Glebe St. Church, whose members were a colony from the Second, was organized Nov. 26, 1848, and Mr. Porter was installed as its pastor. He gave to it such a wealth of pulpit and pastoral endowments, that the new enterprise entered upon a remarkable career of prosperity. Thence he was called in 1851, to the pastorate of the important church at Selma, Alabama, where he remained until 1860, when his health failed to such an extent as to render a continuance of his pulpit labors impossible. A fine estimate of him during this period of his life

is given by a highly intelligent lady who sat under his preaching in Selma, and knew him well :

“He was a courteous and elegant gentleman; a little reserved in manners, even so much as to appear distant on meeting with strangers, but beaming delightfully on his friends. He was a laborious and painstaking pastor, even to this day remembered with grateful affection by those who were under his care. He was an able theologian and a strikingly forcible preacher, a man of mark in the church of the south.”

The writer of this sketch never saw Dr. Porter but once after his graduation, which was at the meeting of the Presbyterian General Assembly in New Orleans in May, 1858. Except that he then wore a heavy beard, and that his hair and beard were well sprinkled with grey hairs, he was to all appearance quite unchanged, and met his classmate with the same quiet, modest, genial manner he had when they were together at Princeton.

After his recovery from a long and dangerous illness he accepted the editorial chair of *The Southern Presbyterian*, a religious paper, which he edited about five years, 1860-1865, residing in Columbia, S. C. This journal he edited with distinguished ability, filling its editorial columns largely with rich and rare productions of his own pen. His connection with this paper ended about the close of the war, when, his health again permitting, he preferred to return to the pulpit. In Feb., 1867, he was called to the pastorate of the church at Spartanburgh, S. C., and labored there until May, 1869, when he left to enter upon his final field of labor in Texas.

While residing in Spartanburg, he received the degree of Doctor of Divinity from Wolford College, a Methodist institution located in that place, which was regarded as an indication of the general appreciation of his great abilities at his own home.

Dr. Porter, in view of the wide destitutions existing in Texas after the war, felt himself strongly attracted thitherward, and the way being providentially opened before him, he took the pastoral charge of the Presbyterian Church at

Austin, the capital of that state. He was never installed as pastor there, but labored as Stated Supply from May, 1869, until his death, which occurred on Dec. 8, 1872. His labors in Austin were not long, but we have the testimony of those in that city who well knew him and his work, that he was regarded by all as "a man of learning, ability and eloquence, and was endeared to all who knew him as a great and good man."

Dr. Porter's principal publications were articles in *The Southern Presbyterian Review*, among which may be mentioned his articles "On Hodge on the Atonement," Vol. xix., p. 313; "North and South," Vol. iii., p. 337; "Power of the Pulpit," Vol. ii., p. 270; "Unity of The Race," Vol. iv., p. 357, and his last one, "On a Call to The Gospel Ministry," which was published, not only in the Review above-mentioned, but afterwards as a pamphlet, and attracted much attention. As has already been said, he also wrote much and ably as Editor of *The Southern Presbyterian*.

Dr. Porter was thrice married: 1. To Miss Hannah Napier Leland, daughter of the Rev. Aaron Leland, D.D., Professor in Columbia Theological Seminary (S. C.), on June 13, 1844. She died at Selma, Ala., April 20, 1845.—2. To Miss Isabel Jane Pratt, daughter of Rev. Horace S. Pratt who had been until his death Professor in the University of Alabama at Tuscaloosa, on May 14, 1848. She died at Columbia, S. C., on January 3, 1862.—3. To Miss Sarah Elizabeth Black, daughter of the Hon. James A. Black of Spartanburg District, S. C., on March 20, 1864. She survived him, and still lives at Austin, Texas. She has married again, and is now the wife of Mr. Frank R. Lubbock, Ex-Governor of Texas.

Dr. Porter left two sons and four daughters: 1. Isabel May, married to Major F. W. James, a banker at Baird, Texas.—2. Francis Leland.—3. Laleah Dunwoody, married to Rev. J. J. Reid, missionary to the Indians, and living at Wapanucka, Indian Territory.—4. Jeannette Hannah, married to Lewis C. Wise, lived at Abilene, Texas, and died in 1877.—5. Abner Addison, married Miss Laura Dalton of Burnet, Texas, and lives in Florida.—6. Mary Logan, only child of the third Mrs. Porter, died at Ridgeway, S. C., October 27, 1873.

Many are the testimonies from eminent Southern divines and others, to the exalted talents and reputation of Dr. Porter. We select only one, from one of the most eminent Southern ministers now living, and who was on terms of intimacy with him for thirty years: "Dr. Porter was an uncommonly fine scholar, and one of the ablest theologians of the Southern Church. He was a clear, vigorous, powerful preacher. He handled great themes with unction, and was full of the spirit of a true Christian minister. His health was poor during most of his ministerial life, but he had indomitable will, and never flinched from toil. He was really a great man, yet wonderfully free from self-consciousness or self-assertion, and was singularly truthful, candid, honest and conscientious."

On one side of the marble shaft that marks his grave in the Austin Cemetery is simply *a radiant crown*, and below it only the words:

"WON."

ABNER ADDISON PORTER.