

Luther Rice.

A DESCENDANT of William the Conqueror, and a near kinsman of the sixth President of the United States, John Quincy Adams, lies buried close by the country road that winds around the graveyard of a Baptist church located in the pine-woods of South Carolina. Many others, related by blood to this man, are worthy of mention. Among them are Samuel Morse, the inventor of the telegraph; Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, the poet; Gamaliel Bradford, the biographer; Julia Ward Howe, the authoress of "The Battle Hymn of the Republic"; Frances E. Willard, the leader of American womanhood in the promotion of temperance reform, and Clara Barton, the founder of the American Red Cross. They alike descended from Goodman Edmund Rice, who migrated from England in 1634, settling in Sudbury, Massachusetts. There are thousands of living Americans who trace their ancestry to this Massachusetts pioneer, and among them are many of the most distinguished names in the annals of America. Meriting a foremost place in any list of religious leaders in the Western World is the name of Luther Rice, "a minister of Christ, of the Baptist Denomination." Born in Northboro', Massachusetts, March 25, 1783, his body for nearly a century has rested under the sougning pines that surround the Pine Pleasant Baptist Church. He died September 25, 1836.

"It is a distinct principle with Baptists," says one of our leading scholars, "that they acknowledge no human authority and subscribe to no human creed. For all these things, Baptists of every name and order go back to the New Testament." Perhaps this accounts for the fact that American Baptists have failed to cherish the memory of their epoch-making spirits, who not only led American Baptists to higher achievements but who made also notable contributions to American culture. This does explain in part the neglect of a just recognition of the ministry of Luther Rice by the denomination he served so faithfully.

The Lutherans have their Martin Luther; the Presbyterians have their John Knox; the Methodists their John Wesley, and the Christian Scientists their Mary Baker Eddy. Popularising the striking events in the life of the leader whose memory the particular religious group seeks to honour, they gratify a craving that is natural and universal, the craving that finds its satisfaction in hero-worship. Baptist history is rich in martyrs, but their names, as well as their martyrdom, have been forgotten. They have had leaders with apostolic zeal and courage whose works remain, but their spiritual descendants do not cherish their memory. A few there were who combined in a single life the

ministry of the prophet and the statesman. These inaugurated movements which have become permanent elements in the political and religious progress of America. If we ignore them, we do ourselves and our generation irreparable harm; for if we forget them we cannot understand aright our past; we are unable therefore correctly to interpret our present, and thereby we doom ourselves to be incompetent as we face the future. If we cannot rightly orient ourselves, we are sadly unfitted to point the way for those whom we would lead.

Spirituality is the very essence of evangelical religion. It is found wherever reverent students of the Scriptures strive to order their lives in harmony with the teachings of Christ. However, it flourishes only where three favouring conditions are provided: (1) Religious liberty, making possible the preaching of the gospel unhindered by any external restraint; (2) The dynamic of a passionate solicitude for the spiritual welfare of others, inspiring group action through the Revival, which is the concerted proclamation of the gospel, characterised by earnest pleadings with the unsaved to renounce sin and to find spiritual security, or salvation, through a personal trust in Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord; (3) The organisation of local Christian groups, who share this experience of grace, who therefore seek to promote spirituality in themselves and in others, and who accept the obligation to proclaim the Lordship of Christ throughout the world; and this organisation, to be effective, must be upon a scale commensurate with its spiritual aims and its world-wide objectives. The conditions essential to the maintenance and the extension of spirituality are religious liberty, evangelical fervour leading to co-operative action, and the creation of effective Christian organisations for the world-wide establishment of the evangelical faith. American Baptists, favoured by these conditions, have, within the comparatively brief period of one hundred and fifty years, grown from a membership of 35,101 in 1784 to 9,813,326 in 1934.

Human instrumentalities played an important part in the creation of these favourable conditions, and surely the men who led in their establishment merit every honour a grateful, spiritually-minded people can bestow upon them. Three names command the highest appreciation, because of their creative leadership. These are Roger Williams, Shubal Stearns and Luther Rice. The first led in the establishment of religious liberty; the second introduced among Baptists the Revival as the implement for promoting vital religion, and the third safeguarded the results of the revival movements by creating organisations, varying in their objectives, that elicited, combined and directed the energies of American Baptists in establishing and perpetuating

their interpretation of the Christian religion throughout the world. The epoch-makers of American Baptists are Roger Williams, the Liberator; Shubal Stearns, the Reinvigorator; and Luther Rice, the Pioneer Organiser.

The Baptists of America are celebrating this year the Tercentenary of Roger Williams, who three hundred years ago was banished from Massachusetts for his espousal of the principle of religious liberty. Dr. George W. Truett, of Dallas, Texas, the President of the Baptist World Alliance, and Dr. J. H. Rushbrooke, of London, England, the General Secretary of the Alliance, were the principal speakers at the Roger Williams Tercentenary, held at the Crozer Theological Seminary, Chester, Pennsylvania, last June. Preparations are being made to observe the one hundredth anniversary of the death of Luther Rice on September 25, 1936. The Luther Rice Centennial Commission has been formed, with headquarters in Washington, D.C., to give direction to this celebration. It is hoped that Baptists throughout the world may become interested in this man, who was the pioneer in the organisation of American Baptists, and to whose statesman-like leadership they are indebted for the existence of the denominational agencies, through which they have gained numerical leadership among the evangelical bodies in the United States.

A study of the movements in Christian history that stress spirituality reveals a common origin in the renewed and reverent study of the New Testament, and a common ground of danger which again and again has weakened, and in the end often has rendered ineffective, the movement itself. The failure to create an organisation, or to provide an adequate support for the organisation when created, tells the story of the defeat of the worthy aims that inspired the followers of John Wyclif, the Pacifistic Anabaptists, the Pietists of Germany and many other similar groups, that with laudable zeal endeavoured to propagate the mystical type of Christian piety. American Baptists did not escape this danger.

One hundred years after the establishment of religious liberty in Rhode Island there were, in the American Colonies, only fifty-one Baptist churches, with less than three thousand members, and these churches were divided into six or more denominations, and, excepting one group in and near Philadelphia, had no form of union for the furtherance of co-operative action. The Revival, known as the Great Awakening, beginning in 1720, spread through the Colonies, and continued in some area of the country for more than half a century. The year that Luther Rice was born, 1783, there were less than 10,000 Baptists in the whole country outside of the Southern colonies, where, due to the introduction of the

Revival by Shubal Stearns in 1755, Baptist churches had multiplied, and the membership in that section had increased to more than 20,000.

However, religious liberty and the evangelistic fervour that accompanied the revivals of the period could not give the Baptists, as compared with other evangelical bodies, a place of leadership. This could be attained only through the creation of a new and effective organisation, in harmony with the genius and the principles of American Baptists. In Luther Rice was found the prophet and the statesman, who was able to make clear and compelling the will of Christ and to outline a national programme for world evangelisation in which every phase of religious activity was fully recognised. Concerning him, the distinguished church historian, William Heth Whitsitt, has said: "The coming of Luther Rice was the most important event in Baptist history in the nineteenth century. He was the magician of American Baptist life."

Luther Rice was born to frustration. The ninth child and the youngest son of Captain Amos and Sarah Graves Rice, he planned to spend his life on his father's farm, near the village of Northboro', Massachusetts, expecting to care for his parents during their declining years. His conversion in 1802 aroused in him the desire to establish family worship and to make religion a regular topic of conversation in the home. This greatly incensed his unregenerated Congregationalist father. Concerning this incident, Luther Rice wrote: "When it pleased God to make me see, and feel, and manifest the reality and life of religion, he (my father) could not bear with it in me. This state of things effectively uprooted the fond anticipation I had indulged of possessing the home and taking care of my parents . . . and thus what might have constituted a material barrier in the way of my devoting my life to the sacred service of the ministry was entirely removed!"

Luther Rice was frustrated in his purpose to be a New England Congregational minister by his call to the foreign mission work. He was frustrated in his plan to present to the heathen of India the interpretation of the Christian faith as it was held by the evangelical Congregationalists of Massachusetts through his becoming convinced that infant baptism was contrary to the teachings of the New Testament, and that the only Scriptural form of faith-baptism was immersion. Mr. and Mrs. Adoniram Judson, fellow-missionaries sent out by American Congregationalists, were received into the fellowship of the Baptist Church in Calcutta, September 6, 1812, and on November 1, 1812, Luther Rice took the same step. He was frustrated in his determination to labour as a foreign missionary, being persuaded that it was his duty to return to America for the purpose

of organising the Baptists for their support of the Judsons. He was frustrated in his expectation, after a short sojourn in the United States, to be associated with Adoniram Judson in Burma, by the insistence of his brethren in the United States that he, and he alone, could secure the financial support needed by the missionary and educational enterprises then being fostered by the denomination. He was frustrated in the carrying out of the magnificent programme he had evolved for American Baptists, and to which he gave his strength, his worldly possessions, and at last his life. His last ten years on earth were spent in the most arduous, unrelenting effort to save Columbian College, an institution of which he was the founder, from closing its doors. This school of learning survives as the George Washington University, but its control has passed into other than Baptist hands. Luther Rice was frustrated in all of his undertakings. His last years were darkened by unmerited criticism, by false charges as to the use of funds entrusted to him, and by the enmity of prominent denominational leaders, who sought to destroy his well-deserved place in the confidence and the affections of his brethren.

A century has elapsed. To-day the name of Luther Rice stands untarnished. The men who investigated the charges made against him were unanimous in affirming him to be an honourable, self-sacrificing servant of God, who assumed financial obligations for the work of the Kingdom greater than he should have attempted.

The return of Luther Rice in 1813 from India, converted on the foreign field to Baptist doctrines, principles and practices, electrified the whole denomination. Immediately he set to work to raise funds for the support of the Judsons. On foot, by horseback, and in sulky, he went up and down the land. In eleven months, he reports that he had "travelled 6,600 miles in populous and in dreary portions of the country, through wilderness and over rivers, across mountains and valleys, in heat and cold, by day and night, in weariness, painfulness, fastings, and loneliness, but not a moment lost for want of health; no painful calamity has befallen my lot; no peril has closed upon me, nor has fear been permitted to prey upon my spirits nor even inquietude to disturb my peace." Eloquent, persuasive, inspired by the vision of a hundred thousand Baptists organised to extend the Redeemer's kingdom, he challenged American Baptists to expect great things from God and to attempt great things for God. His work made possible the first organisation of Baptists on a national scale, the General Convention of the Baptist Denomination in the United States for Foreign Missions, which was formed at Philadelphia in 1814. He invested his own funds in the

Columbian Star, the first Baptist periodical to have a nation-wide circulation, and turned over all of its profits to the cause of missions. He founded Columbian College in Washington City, the nation's capital. He was active in the organisation, and in addition to his many other duties became the financial agent of the Baptist General Tract Society, formed February 25, 1824, in Washington, D.C. This Society, now known as the American Baptist Publication Society, has been faithful to its original object "to disseminate evangelical truth and to inculcate sound morals."

The greatest achievement of Luther Rice was the binding into a spiritual union the widely scattered Baptist churches, and the imparting to Baptist ministers and laymen his passion for world evangelism, for an educated ministerial leadership and for a thoroughly Christianised culture. No other man of his day could have accomplished as much as did he, within the decade 1814 to 1824. He was the master spirit among American Baptists. He introduced on a national scale the type of organisation, voluntary in principle, and missionary in purpose, that, grounded upon religious liberty, garnered the fruits of the revival by eliciting, combining and directing the energies of the entire denomination in the sacred, co-operative endeavour to strengthen and to extend the Redeemer's Kingdom at home and abroad. Inspired by his example of unselfish devotion, many young men went from his presence quickened to do their part in uniting the Baptist churches throughout all the States of the American Union for more effective service. They founded colleges, published religious papers and magazines, organised State Baptist Conventions and laid wide and deep the foundations upon which our Baptist institutions and agencies now rest.

An evaluation of the worth of this man, who saved American Baptists from the disintegrating influences that always accompany a lack of organisation, is given in the words inscribed upon the marble slab that covers his grave and expresses the considered judgment of his South Carolina Baptist contemporaries :

Following is the epitaph as it appears :

Born		Died
March 25th	Beneath this marble	Sept. 25th
A.D. 1783	are deposited the remains of	A.D. 1836

ELDER LUTHER RICE

A minister of Christ, of the Baptist Denomination.
 He was a native of Northboro', Massachusetts
 And departed this life in Edgefield District, S.C.
 In the death of this distinguished servant of the Lord,
 "is a great man fallen in Israel."

THAN HE

Perhaps no American has done
 more for the great Missionary
 Enterprise.
 It is thought the first American
 Foreign Mission, on which he
 went
 to India, associated with Judson
 and others, originated with him.
 And if the Burmans have cause
 of gratitude toward Judson,
 for a
 faithful vision of God's Word,
 so they will thro' generations
 to come,
 "arise up and call Rice
 blessed,"
 for it was his eloquent appeals
 for the Heathen, on his return
 to America which raised our
 Baptist churches to adopt the
 Burman Mission, and sustain
 Judson in his arduous toils.

No Baptist has done more
 for the cause of education.
 He founded "Columbian College
 in the District of Columbia,"
 which he benevolently intended
 by its central position,
 to diffuse knowledge,
 both literary and religious,
 through these United States.
 And if for want of deserved
 patronage, that unfortunate
 Institution,
 which was the special
 subject of his prayers and toils
 for the last fifteen years
 of his life, fail to fulfil the
 high purpose of its founder,
 yet the spirit of
 education
 awakened by his labours,
 shall accomplish his
 noble aim.

LUTHER RICE

With portly person and commanding presence
 Combined a strong and brilliant intellect.
 As a theologian he was orthodox,
 A scholar, his education was liberal.
 He was an eloquent and powerful preacher,
 A self-denying and indefatigable philanthropist.
 His frailties with his dust are entombed,
 And upon the walls of Zion his virtues engraved.

By order of the Baptist Convention, for the State of
 South Carolina
 this Monument is
 erected
 to his memory.

American Baptists honour themselves in setting aside
 September 25, 1936, as a day to be observed in memory of
 Luther Rice.

RUFUS WASHINGTON WEAVER.