

A SHORT BIOGRAPHY OF CHARLES HODGE

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His Life

Charles Hodge was born December 28, 1797 in Philadelphia, the last of five children born to Hugh and Mary Hodge. Both parents were of distinguished families; his mother was of Huguenot descent. His father, who descended from Irish roots, died six months after Charles was born, leaving his mother to raise him and his brother (only the two of them survived infancy) on limited means.

Speaking of his forebears in America, Charles Hodge wrote in his journal, "I wish...that those who come after me should know that their ancestors and kindred were Presbyterians and patriots."¹

Of his childhood he wrote,

To our mother, my brother and myself, under God, owe absolutely everything...Our mother was a Christian. She took us regularly to church, and carefully drilled us in the Westminster Catechism, which we recited on stated occasions to Dr. Ashbel Green, our pastor.²

There has never been anything remarkable in my religious experience, unless it be that it began very early. I think that in my childhood I came nearer to conforming to the apostle's injunction: 'Pray without ceasing', than in any other period of my life. As far back as I can remember, I had the habit of thanking God for everything I received, and asking him for everything I wanted. If I lost a book, or any of my play things, I prayed that I might find it. I prayed walking along the streets, in school and out of school, whether playing or studying. I did not do this in obedience to any prescribed rule. It seemed natural. I thought of God as an everywhere-present Being, full of kindness and love, who would not be offended if children talked to him. I knew he cared for sparrows. I was as cheerful and happy as the birds and acted as they did. There was little more in my prayers and praises than in the worship rendered by the fowls of the air. This mild form of natural religion did not amount to much. It, however, saved me from profanity.³

At the age of fourteen years he entered the sophomore class of the College of New Jersey. It was here that he met John Johns, a lifelong friend of whom more will be said under "Friendships". Revival came to the college in the winter of 1814-15 and the result was that Charles made a public profession of faith by joining the Presbyterian Church of Princeton on January 13, 1815.

In 1816 he entered Princeton Theological Seminary, then in the fourth year of its

existence, and graduated in 1819. In May of that year the young Hodge was asked by Archibald Alexander, president of the seminary, "How would you like to be a professor in the seminary?" (He was only twenty-two years of age.) Acting according to a plan proposed by Alexander, Hodge went home to Philadelphia to study Hebrew. In October of that year he was licensed to preach the gospel and entered upon "missionary" work in the Philadelphia area. Written in his journal from that period of his life are these words, "May I be taught of God that I may be able to teach others also."⁴

Hodge was appointed in May, 1820 to serve as a teacher at the seminary. In September of 1821 he was ordained to the ministry and in May of the following year he was elected as Professor of Oriental and Biblical Literature of the Seminary. His pay was \$1,000 per year.

On June 17, 1822 Hodge married Miss Sarah Bache, who was the great-granddaughter of Benjamin Franklin. Hodge had first met her in 1813. Hodge's brother, Hugh, wrote about Sarah, who was

then a girl of fourteen years of age, well grown, in blooming health, handsome, full of imagination, and exceedingly enthusiastic, unconscious of self and absorbed in whatever claimed her attention; a most agreeable companion. It was no wonder therefore that she soon won the love of my brother Charles.⁵

At their marriage Charles was described as

slender, of average height, very youthful-looking, with light brown hair, curling over a finely formed head, a light complexion...illuminated by the light of blue eyes.

Sarah was "of full standard height for women, of symmetrical form, dark auburn hair, large blue-grey eyes..."⁶

In the *Life of Charles Hodge*, A. A. Hodge wrote that in 1826 "...the sense of his (C. Hodge) own deficiencies became more intense."⁷ Application was made to the Board of Directors of the seminary to study for two years in Europe. Leaving his family (his wife and two children) with his mother, he sailed from New York in October, 1826. He studied in Paris until February of the following year and then went to Halle, Germany, where he was introduced to Wilhelm Gesenius (whom Hodge in a letter to his mother described as being not more than forty years old, *frivolous*, and...rather foppish in his appearance. He has a silly laugh for every thing he says, and is in short the last man I should have selected from ten thousand as a distinguished philologist).⁸

Here also he made the acquaintance of Friedrich Augustus Tholuck, with whom he "formed a personal friendship, which on both sides remained unabated to the end of their long lives."⁹

From Halle he made his way through Germany, meeting Augustus Neander in Dresden and finally arriving at Berlin, October 12, 1827. There, among others, he met Ernst Hengstenberg and Friedrich Schleiermacher. His journal from his stay in Berlin contains this note,

They sang, also, one piece from an old German composer, Bach, whose works have long been neglected, but which they say are equal to almost any of the best German compositions.¹⁰

Before leaving Europe he paid a visit to Switzerland. From there he wrote to Sarah, "I have seen the Alps!" "I raised my eyes-and around me in a grand amphitheatre, high up against the heavens, were the Alps!" "This was the first moment of my life in which I felt overwhelmed. Everything I had ever previously seen seemed absolutely nothing."¹¹ From Switzerland he journeyed through France to England where he listened to the Duke of Wellington speak in the House of Lords and said that he heard Charles Simeon preach with great delight. His son and biographer, A. A. Hodge, recorded that he "reached his home, in Princeton, about the 18th of September 1828 WHERE THERE WAS JOY."¹² His son, then being five years of age, added that this was "the first abiding image of his father."

Upon his return from Europe, he resumed his writing for the *Biblical Repertory* (later to become the *Princeton Review*) which he had established in 1825 before going to Europe. Hodge would continue to be the editor of the *Repertory* from the date of its initiation and for the next 43 years.

Rutgers College in New Brunswick, New Jersey, conferred upon Mr. Hodge the degree of Doctor of Divinity in 1834.

In 1840, in view of the advancing age of Dr. Alexander, Hodge was transferred from the chair of Oriental and Biblical Literature to the chair of Exegetical and Didactic Theology. Upon the death of Dr. Alexander in 1851, Polemic Theology was added to Hodge's title. His son said, "This change... was not only not sought by him, but was regarded at first with decided aversion."¹³ Before the change was made official, Hodge wrote his brother,

I have felt it to be my duty to be perfectly quiet, and make no intimation of my own wishes on the subject...First, because I do not think my wishes ought to have anything to do with the business. I ought to be willing to do just what the church bids me. The second reason is, that I would not presume to put my wishes in opposition to those of Dr. Alexander...To you, however I may say in confidence, that I would give five thousand dollars, if I had them, to be let off. The new arrangement knocks all my plans in the head, and will increase my official labors for years to come fourfold.¹⁴

The change of chairs, according to A.A. Hodge, "was one of the capital and most advantageous turning points in Dr. Hodge's life."

In May, 1846, he was elected moderator of the Presbyterian Church when it met at the 10th Presbyterian Church in Philadelphia.

Charles and Sarah had eight children; two born before he left for Europe, and six after his return. But then, on Christmas Day, 1849 Sarah, his wife of twenty-seven and one half years died in the fifty-first year of her life. After her death, Hodge would write to his brother, "No human being can tell, prior to the experience, what it is to lose out of a family its head and heart, the source at once of its light and love."¹⁵

In 1852 he was married a second time to a widow, Mrs. Mary Hunter Stockton. In a letter to his friend Bishop Johns he wrote,

I have known her by sight since she was fifteen years old. For the last six or seven years she was a sister to Sarah, and therefore to me. She was familiarly known and greatly loved by all my children, who were almost as much at home in her house as in my own. She has come into my family as an old friend, every heart already her own, and we all feel her presence as a token and assurance of God's favor.¹⁶

A semi-centennial celebration was observed at the First Presbyterian Church in Princeton on April 24, 1872 for the fiftieth year of his professorship at the seminary. On that occasion \$45,000 was contributed for a permanent endowment of the chair which Hodge had filled and, in addition, a gift of over fifteen thousand dollars was given to Hodge himself.

The following greeting was sent from the principals and professors of the Theological Faculties of the Free Church of Scotland:

We only express to yourself what, on occasions without number, we have expressed to others, when we say that we regard your services in the cause of revealed truth, extending over a half a century, as of inestimable value, and that we look on you as one of the chief instruments raised up by the Head of the church, in these times of doubt and contention, for maintaining in its purity the faith once delivered unto the saints...We congratulate you further on the honorable and distinguished place which you hold in the esteem of the whole Presbyterian Church, and of all churches that prize Evangelical truth,-on the affectionate regard so warmly cherished for you by your students, both past and present,-and on the happy domestic influence, which through God's blessing, has given to the church sons like-minded with yourself, following in your footsteps, and aiding in your work.¹⁷ (Two of Hodge's sons taught at Princeton: A.A. Hodge and Caspar Wistar Hodge.)

Dr. Henry Boardman addressed him in behalf of those gathered for the occasion, which included, among others, four hundred of his former students. Boardman told Dr. Hodge, "in reviewing this half century of your labors, we reverently glorify God in you." Speaking of the type of theology taught in the seminary, Boardman remarked,

a censorious critic said the other day, derisively in reviewing the volumes of Theology, lately published, 'It is enough for Dr. Hodge to believe a thing to be true that he finds it in the Bible.' We accept the token. Dr. Hodge has never gotten beyond the Bible. It contains every jot and title of his theology.¹⁸

In response to the reverence, affection, and gratitude which was variously expressed on that occasion, Hodge, after Boardman had concluded his remarks, rose to say,

A man is to be commiserated who is called upon to attempt the impossible. The certainty of failure does not free him from the necessity of the effort. It is impossible that I should make you understand the feelings which swell my heart almost to bursting.¹⁹

Now we come to the close of his life. After attending the funeral of a friend on May 16, 1878, Hodge began to weaken. On the second Sabbath of June his absent children were summoned. His son tells us that a bed was erected for him in the back parlor of his home next to his study. He sought to spend the days in his "great chair" in his study. His son said, "On one of those very last days he said, 'This old chair and I have been growing to fit each other for forty years.'" A.A. Hodge commented on this quote,

This fact is a striking and characteristic illustration of his constitutional trait of conservatism-forty-five years reclining and sitting, reading, writing, praying and talking in one spot of one room. During all these

years also he omitted on no single morning, when at home, to record the direction of the wind, and the state of the thermometer, and of the sky. He likewise, until almost his last years, resisted all the efforts made by a younger generation to induce him to have his clothes made elsewhere than at the same old shop which he had patronized from the first, through all its succession of occupants. There was no element of his nature inclined to new measures, any more than to new doctrines.²⁰

During those final days,

Seeing his widowed daughter weeping while she watched him, he stretched his hand toward her and said, 'Why should you grieve, daughter? To be absent from the body is to be with the Lord, to be with the Lord is to see the Lord, to see the Lord is to be like Him.'²¹

Even in his last hours when

freedom from pain and from torpor was gained for a little, he was alert and inquisitive with his usual interest in events around him, and events of the day....²²

Hodge died on June 19, 1878. His funeral was held on Saturday, June 22. Dr. William Paxton preached the sermon. All the stores in the town were closed and all business suspended in token of respect.

¹ A.A.Hodge, *Life of Charles Hodge*, p. 5.

² Ibid., p. 9,13.

³ Ibid., p. 13.

⁴ Ibid., p.74.

⁵ Ibid., p. 29.

⁶ Ibid., p. 95.

⁷ Ibid., p. 100.

⁸ Ibid., pp 115-16.

⁹ Ibid., p. 117.

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 183.

¹¹ Ibid., p. 197.

¹² Ibid., p. 201.

¹³ Ibid., p. 322.

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 322.

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 373.

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 392.

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 525.

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 516.

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 518.

²⁰ Ibid., p. 236.

²¹ Ibid., p. 582.

²² Ibid., p 580-81.