DR. JACOBS AND HIS WORK

By James Henry Rice, Jr.

The Life of William Plumer Jacobs. By Thornwell Jacobs, A. M., L. L. O. Fleming H. Revell Company, New York and London; pp. 277. From the publishers.

Dr. Jacobs deserved to have his life written. On the whole, it was well that the first attempt should have come from his son, who has made a readable volume, albeit he might have made a better by stuffing it with more facts from a life, richly freighted with them, and by omitting deductions and observations which an intelligent reader can best make for himself. Dr. Jacobs of all men needed no literary adornment to render his life interesting. In itself it is more fascinating than romance; or, one might say, it is itself romance, emanating from the heart and brain of a tireless worker, who sought results and got them in the noblest field to which man can devote his attention, that of doing good to the helpless.

The Apostle says: "Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, to visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world."

Here, in modern times, is an example worthy of the patriarchial ages.

If Mr. Thornwell Jacobs has curtailed where he might have expanded, nevertheless, he has done a fine thing and done it well. His devotion to his distinguished father shines through his work. The book is worth anybody's while to read.

The rarest human quality is unselfish devotion: it was never rarer than now, strange as it seems, when charities are carried on wholesale. But modern charities have a commercial substratum—a Babylonish garment, tucked away in the tent. We feed the Germans that they may pay. We entered the war to make the world safe for ourselves, then safe for democracy, our doctrines, and lastly, for humanity—two-thirds of the motive selfish. Metternich said Napoleon could not believe man ever acted from any motive but self-interest; he found it a working theory. It was his grievous loss that he failed to meet and recognize the higher qualities of men and women. It must be remembered that Napoleon arose amid the spasmodic outworkings of democracy and was indeed the high priest of modern democracy: the foe to monarchy and aristocracy, and the world's experience shows that democracies breed selfishness. "Republics are ungrateful" is but another form of the expression.

But, on his lonely island prison, when he was forgotten by his democratic associates, a noble English woman and certain noble Frenchmen, with an equally noble Irish physician, taught him at last that unselfishness did exist.

Born in Charleston.

Dr. Jacobs was born in Yorkville, but spent his youth in Charleston, girt about by aristocracy and chivalry. He grew up under the very shadow of St. Michael's. He was bred within the pale of the sternest of all aristocratic churches, the Southern Presbyterian, whose unbending will did more to make a breach with the North than all other causes; a church, moreover, that furnished the strongest writers and most impassioned orators, whose training had armed Calhoun with his logic.

Again, no city of its size in America, perhaps none of equal size in the world, carries on so much work for pure charity, than this same city of Charleston. None has ever furnished more men per capital to the defense of the country. No city in the country has suffered more; one has risen from suffering and trial with more self-reliant determination. Villified, abused, her name bandied about, suffering for the sins of aliens that took possession of her when most of her defenders were dead and all her people prostrate; Charleston survives as a cheerful and wonderful illustration of the cavaliers that founded it and of the Huguenots that later enriched its life.

In this city, when its glory was brightest, its prosperity greatest and its culture most persuasive and uplifting, William Plumer Jacobs was born. His first education was received there, and hence his deepest impressions.

My father said to me once: "Taking them at their best, the citizens of Charleston are the noblest body of citizens on the continent." This was a good while ago and the standard may have suffered in the passages of modern life; but the standard waves, and while it does there is always hope that Charleston will equal again her fairest record of the past.

Reported the Democratic Convention of 1860.

On the eve of the great War Between the States, Dr. Jacob had attained manhood. He reported the Democratic convention of 1860, the meeting of the State Legislature later and lastly the Secession convention—rich experiences truly. All the while he was quietly studying problems that arose. In 1858 he had become convinced that slavery was wrong, and at first his sympathy was altogether with the Union, only to change later, on hearing of divers atrocities; all which belongs to the history of the time. Following his bent (he had joined the church some time before, he passed through the Southern Theological Seminary in Columbia, and was admitted to the ministry.

Long before this, however, he had spent much of his youth with friends on Edisto and rated his experience as among the most fruitful of his life, as well he might. A youth who had the double privilege of being bred in Charleston and of associating with the planters on Edisto in their homes was surely well equipped for any conflict in the world outside. Hence, beyond question, was derived his gentleness of manner and speech; he went forth a gentleman as well as a Christian (and they are truly the same thing).

In due course of time, led by a faith that never faltered, he reached the scene of his life work, Clinton, in the county of Laurens. He has often told me of the squalor, wretchedness, violence, of the little village amid the red hills, as it was then. Today there is no cleaner, saner, healthier town within the confines of the country.

Conditions at Clinton Forty-Odd Years Ago.

The community was poor; the county was poor; the whole State lay under a ban of poverty and oppression. Men scarcely dared call their lives their own. The carpet-baggers and the negro ruled the State, backed by Federal bayonets, supported by ebullient fanaticism at the North. Only those old enough to remember a Laurens crowd in action forty-odd years ago, when the fires of patriotism and the pride of race were set ablaze with whiskey, can understand the condition Dr. Jacobs found at Clinton. If there were a place in the whole world less fitted for the establishment of a noble charity no man could name it.

But here he came; here he stopped; and here he founded an institution as noble and as fertile in good works as any the world can boast.

Among the visitors at Locust Grove, our family's upcountry home forty-five years ago, was a quiet man, who drove in from Clinton, jogging along the roads in his buggy, always on business and always welcome. He came like a zephy, bringing peace and rest, and leaving an influence that stuck. Sometimes he preached for us in the little church at Ninety-Six, where now all the elder's sleep, awaiting the Resurrection. He was not an eloquent preacher—far otherwise—but when he prayed something happened. Just what, nobody knew, but the harness's drew near. The frail form was convulsed, the voice grew deadly in earnest. It was, as we knew afterward, when the subject had long pondered and discussed in awed tones, the fearsome, solemn sight of a man talking face to face with his God. Protestant, Catholic, Jew and Gentile, believer and unbeliever, confessed alike that here was a man, serving his Maker. Dr. Jacobs was devoted to his church, but in his work he knew no sect, and he was trusted implicitly by all.

The "Story" of His Work.

Twenty-five years ago Dr. Jacobs, in his study at Clinton, told me the story of his work from end to end, which now his son has repeated with loving care (although he might have said much more, for there is much more to tell.)

It came about in this way: As Christmas drew near I was thinking of how best to serve the institution, and, lacking means to give it what I wished, determined to bend the power of the press, as far as I could wield it, to the service of the orphanage—an idea that met the approval of Dr. Jacobs. So I went to Clinton and put up with him, going over it all, hearing the tale, seeing the sights and then came home with what the newspaper men call "the story."

It brought responses from far and near and the orphanage received far more than it would ever be in my power to give, though less than it deserved. In reproducing the article Dr. Jacobs insisted that all reference to himself be deleted, and finally had his way.

Mr. Thornwell Jacobs has omitted some details, as related by Dr. Jacobs. From his relation, as published at the time in The State, January 10, 1897, the following is quoted:

(In 1872 he had written to Dr. John B. Adger for advice as to the care of orphans). "The reply was characteristic of Dr. Adger's broad mind. He wrote: 'The man who feels the need of any work, he himself is the one to d othat work.' Dr. Jacobs modestly says this set him to thinking. Until the 8th of January, 1873, all the work was carried on by the session of the Clinton church, but the board of visitors of the Thornwell Orphanage was organized at the first meeting (January 8, 1873)."

Dr. Jacobs says:

"I remember as though it were but yesterday the assembly of the band of workers in my parlor. The plan was presented. The time came to vote on it. It was a solemn moment. I told the brethren present that if they voted aye it meant that I and they must cast in our lot together for life; that we were the least among the thousands of Israel; that neither pastor nor people were known to the church; that our poor little congregation was struggling for very life, having just called its pastor for all his time, and that we must look forward to years of unremitting toil. There was this to encourage: The cause was one upon which we could ask God's blessing, and, assuredly if we asked, we should receive. The vote was taken. Each one present voted aye, and our dear Brother Bell said: 'Now, Brethren, forward.'"

One of the earliest circulars for help contained the following:

"Dear Friend: Wherever you may be pray for the success of our orphanage. If you cannot give silver and gold, give at least your prayer. If you pray aright God will turn these prayers of yours to silver and gold, for He has the treasury, and He is the God of the fatherless."

Jacobs' Folly.

Known at first as "Jacobs' Folly," the institution thus founded has amply vindicated the foresight of its founder and the faith by which it lived. From the first it lived by faith; to the last it lived by faith, of which there are thousands of examples, scores of which are known to me.

When Dr. Jacobs returned from Europe, where he had been sent for his health, he found the treasury empty and the institution in debt. The board was in session; they had reached an impass.

"What on earth are you going to do, Dr. Jacobs?" the president asked.

"I am going right ahead," said Dr. Jacobs. "This is God's work and He will provide for it."

Whereupon Mr. Bailey offered to advance money for a month's maintenance on Dr. Jacobs' note. At the end of the month the debt was paid, the treasury contained eight thousand dollars and the work went on.

Dr. Thornwell Jacobs does tell, however, one incident fraught with pathos; that of the little orphan boy, Willie Anderson, who standing at his widowed mother's knee, when the orphanage was being discussed, came over to Dr. Jacobs, put his arm around the doctor's neck and extending his hand, opened it, showing a silver half dollar. It was his worldly possession in those days, even among men, and he gave it to the orphanage. "It was the first drop of the silver shower," said Dr. Jacobs. The boy became a mill president in Alabama and continued to give half he earned to the orphanage.

Mrs. McCormick, of Chicago, learned through her pastor, who had visited South Carolina, of the work and she sent down her architect to erect a building; which was done. Being invited to come down, she expressed herself satisfied with what had been done, but not satisfied that she had done enough; so another building was built. Yet later, when her son married Edith Rockefeller, she had a building erected, as a wedding gift, known as the Edith Home for Girls. In the dedicatory sermon Dr. Thornwell called it "A wedding gift more enduring than the ages."

The Work Continued to Grow.

And so the work grew, building following building, and ever more orphans being cared for. Dr. Jacobs was the originator of this idea, at least in the South, namely, that orphans were entitled to the best. They were God's wards, and it was a debt we owed to Him; it must be discharged to the utmost.

In season and out of season Dr. Jacobs called for what a man had to give. In any event the man could give himself, and he shouted. Having preached a sermon along this line one night, and laying stress on the point, he found a tramp next morning awaiting him at the door. "Doctor, you said last night that a man could give himself, if he had nothing else. That is my case. I come for orders."

Orders he got forthwith, without a minute's lost time. The man was Tom Scott, a native of London. He became manager of the farm and of the grounds, and a wonderful manager he was for the rest of his life. The message smote through the ragged breast of the tramp and reached his heart. One might truly say that the hand of the Lord reached out and took him in, setting him to work in the vineyard.

At first, and for long years, Mrs. Jacobs became matron to the orphanage until her sweet life ended.

The love the children bore to Dr. Jacobs was wonderful. He was a father to them all.

In course of time a college grew out of the orphanage, and is now the Presbyterian College of South Carolina, a flourishing institution.

Would Take Volumes to Tell the Story.

One might go on and on. Not one, but many, volumes would be required to give the whole story, but this is enough to show what manner of man Dr. Jacobs was; and some day there will be another biography, for men need such astory told in full, and it can not be told too often; especially at a time when greed has gripped the world so tight and hard that there is a harvest of blood and flame swathing the globe, followed by hate and fury and unbridled passions, whose end man may not foretell.

The conflagration, quenched on the battlefield, may break out any day in any part of the world. We do not know, indeed is breaking out.

Since Dr. Jacobs began his work, the stalwart yeomanry of the up-country has given way to the tradesman and the manufacturer. The Piedmont is not producing great thinkers as of old; of which there are sinister signs. The churches appear to have gone daft and wander in stronger fields, bowing before strange gods. The horizon is clouded. Strange portents! Cryptic signs! Curious wall writing, with no Daniel to interpret.

It seems to have been forgotten that the old prophet and the little lad, shut up in the city, have with them more might than the armies ranged round about.

Democratic formulas can not stop the witches' dance among the nations; nor are they antidotes to the devil's brew swallowed by the children of men. The end of all which, we say, no man knows.

What we do know is that the faith of the ages is just as potent as it ever was. God's word stands; likewise, His promises. The world has owed its safety more than once to a return to the altar and to humble contrition before the Judge of all the earth, who spares us yet.

"The tumult and the shouting dies:" yea, verily! Nullification, secession, reconstruction, political upheavals among us. So also shall pass away this following after the "traditions of men."

The awful necessity—the necessity of self-preservation laid on the world—will yet compel a return to reliance on the promises of God, to an observance of His laws, to a study of His written word. There is no escape from it. Well that there is not. If left to man and his devices the world would soon, within an incredibly short time, become a shambles, as much of it now is.

It is neither from the tyranny of kings nor from the rascality of mobs that deliverance is to be had. Not in the form, but in the spirit must there be change.

His Life Shines Like a Star.

So, shining like a star amid the gloom of the dark time of reconstruction in South Carolina, is the life of the gentle preacher, who, led by faith and fed on prayer, did so noble a work for the widow and the orphan; set so splendid an example to his own and other churches, and to the people throughout the land.

Of all that he collected, he would retain not a cent for himself, and to the end refused to accept a salary above what he had first received as pastor of a small country church. Call after call came to him. Time and again his congregation, grown in wealth under his guidance, sought to force something on him, only to be met by stern refusal, until on one momentous occasion he poured out his heart in passionate protest that he should be rated in terms of money; and the offense was never repeated. Clinton dates time from that event.

After these years he sleeps beside the wife of his youth. The record is finished, glorious, beautiful, beyond any man's language to express; for there was that in it that shone out from a land to which we journey and on which our hopes are set.

"Fast by that city, where, tideless, sleep the Saints of God," South Carolina has no prouder claim on the affections of mankind than that it produced William Plumer Jacobs.

James Henry Rice, Jr.

EDITOR'S NOTE—This interesting sketch of the life of the late and beloved Dr. W. P. Jacobs, appeared in Sunday's issue of The News & Courier. The author, James Henry Rice, resides in Beaufort and is one of the State's most fluent writers.