

THOMAS RIX.

A Memoir.

Last year, after more than half a century's connection with the Wesleyan Church as member and zealous office-bearer, Mr. Thomas Rix, full of years and of trust in God, was gathered to his fathers.

He was born on August 18th, 1813, at Great Yarmouth, England, of which city his brother-in-law, Mr. Robert Steward, was afterwards mayor for five years in succession. At fourteen years of age he was apprenticed to the drapery business at Diss, in Norfolk. He was to have been a midshipman in the merchant service; but, being an only son, his mother's solicitations kept him from going to sea. He and his employer at Diss were both Independents, but the latter, disliking the Independent minister of that town, took his apprentices with him to the Wesleyan chapel. After he had completed his indentures, he continued to attend the Methodist services, and in 1834, under the ministrations of the Rev. John Rogers, supernumerary, Chelmsford, he became earnestly religious. In January, 1834, he received a letter from his venerable father, which began thus:—"My dear and well-beloved Thomas,—Your letter pours forth the effusions of a heart so full of kindness, that the bare contemplation of it fills me with ecstasy. I have great pleasure in reading your religious declarations, as I believe they flow from a pure heart, and I hope, by faith in our blessed Redeemer, and the assistance of His Holy and Divine Spirit, you will find great comfort in passing through this life, and finally enter into everlasting happiness." On March 6th, the next year, when living at Lewisham, Kent, he was admitted on trial as a church member at Greenwich (Deptford

Circuit), by the Rev. Josiah Hill. Shortly after this he removed to Woolwich, where, four years later, he began business for himself as a draper and silk mercer, and soon afterwards married Miss Finch, of that town. (They celebrated their golden wedding in January, 1889.)

Before his marriage he had been chosen poor steward, and, after it, he became a class leader and society steward, and was elected a member of the London Mission Committee. He took an active part in securing the expulsion from the Methodist Church of those who sided with the Revs. Dunn, Brown, and Griffiths, the founders of the "New Connexion." He was always proud of the fact that he was one of those at the Woolwich Quarterly Meeting who voted for Wm. Morley Punshon, afterwards the orator of Methodism, as a candidate for the ministry, and, as there was a majority of only one, he used facetiously to say that he was the one whose vote made Dr. Punshon a clergyman.

One day towards the end of 1852, when going by boat up to London, he and a fellow townsman, Mr. Grundy, architect, began chatting about the recent gold discoveries in Australia. As an outcome of their conversation they agreed to sell off their Woolwich businesses, and take their families out to Victoria, with the intention of returning after a five-years' sojourn there. With his wife and five surviving children, he took ship in January, 1853, and landed at Geelong on June 18th following. Before leaving Old England he received several presentations which show the high esteem in which he was held. One was a reference Bible and Wesley's hymns bound together, with this inscription, "Presented to Mr. T. Rix by the members of his class as a token of

their Christian affection, and as an acknowledgment of the spiritual benefit received through his instrumentality. Mizpah, Genesis xxxi. 49." Another was a gold-inlaid silver cigar box, with the following inscription on the lid: "Presented, with a purse of £50, to Mr. Thomas Rix, by his sincere friends and brother directors of the Woolwich Consumers' Gas Company, as a mark of their esteem, for his uniform kindness, untiring zeal, and impartial conduct as vice-chairman, during his ten years' connection with the above company. Dec. 29th, 1852.—L. DAVIS, Chairman." Another was a copy of Ferguson's *Astronomy*, in which was written: "I present this book to my dear and long-tried friend, Thos. Rix, as a small token of fixed esteem, the result of that close intimacy which has subsisted between us during the roll of the last twenty years. . . EDWARD FAIRBROTHER."

The credentials he brought with him from Woolwich procured him a warm welcome at Geelong, and, within a week of his landing, he was made a class-leader. The superintendent minister of the circuit was the Rev. Frederick Lewis, assisted by the Rev. Richard Hart, as junior. Besides being a class-leader, he was subsequently circuit steward, first at Chilwell and then at Yarra-street, and was also chosen superintendent of the Sabbath-school at the latter church. He was a member of the Connexional and Educational Committees at the first Conferences of the Wesleyan Church held in Australia. On his subsequent removal to Ballarat he had charge of the young men's class at the Lydiard-street Sunday-school, was leader of a young men's week-night society class, and filled other offices in the Church, besides always taking a prominent part in the after services, until his health broke down in 1878 at the age of 65 years. Both as class-leader and office-bearer, and as lay delegate to the larger councils of the Church, he, by his unflagging zeal, marked ability and wisdom, and large-hearted sympathy, exerted an influence equalled by few laymen. The many that knew him in these relations can never forget his noble face when aglow with enthusiasm, or his rich, thrilling voice when giving out his favourite hymns, or offering up fervent, heart-stirring prayer. Many lives are the better for his kindly counsels.

In his social relations he was characterised by geniality and instinctive politeness, and he was generous to a fault. He was an able speaker and a keen debater, holding pronounced opinions, and was elected borough councillor when resident at Newtown, Geelong. Many letters show how sincere and long-lasting were the friendships he formed in earlier years.

In his home circle he was loved with surpassing tenderness, and deeply revered, children and grandchildren vying with each other in showing him love and respect. Family worship morning and evening, while health permitted, was to him the most sacred of religious services, the recollection of which is cherished by all who knelt at his family altar. His children, even into adult age, to the last always freely unbosomed their cares to him, being assured of loving sympathy and well-weighed advice.

In business he was a man of punctilious precision, one who rapidly grasped any new phase of affairs, and quickly saw the end from the beginning. His advice in business matters was sought and valued by many. With most of the qualities which command success, he was too generous and trustful, and this, together with a succession of adverse circumstances, made the cares of living during the latter part of his life often anxious, and at times acute. For many years he carried on business as auctioneer and commission agent. But reverses in Geelong, owing to the wholesale and rapid depreciation of property and other causes, and business anxieties in Ballarat, together with an asthma increasing in severity every year, culminated, soon after he came to live near his son in South Yarra, in a stroke of paralysis. His slow recovery from this left him, though clear in mind, yet feeble in body. As long as he had strength to walk he went to the Sabbath-morning services at Punt-road Church, South Yarra, close to which he resided; but he could never venture out at night.

For years past the first thing on rising, and the last before retiring, he never failed to read his well-loved Bible and Jeremy Taylor's *Holy Living and Dying*. The best thumbed page in the latter contains the prayer, beginning with, "Into thy hands, most blessed

Jesu, I commend my soul and body, for Thou redeemed both with Thy precious blood. So bless and sanctify my sleep unto me, that it may be temperate, holy, and safe; a refreshment to my wearied body, to enable it so to serve my soul, that both may serve Thee with a never-failing duty." Occasionally he would read over some of the many hymns he used to delight in. Those he loved most were:—

No. 30, beginning with—

"Where shall my wondering soul begin;
How shall I all to heaven aspire?"

No. 38.—"O God, of good, the unfathomed sea!
Who would not give his heart to Thee?"

No. 189.—"Now I have found the ground wherein
Sure my soul's anchor may remain."

No. 616.—"All ye that pass by, to Jesus draw nigh."

No. 224.—"I'll praise my Maker while I've breath,
And when my voice is lost in death,
Praise shall employ my nobler powers."

Just before Easter of last year he had an attack of bronchitis, which left him very weak. All his children and nearly all his grandchildren came to see him shortly after this. A fortnight later, on the evening of Saturday, the 19th April, he retired early, showing more than usual of his old sprightliness, and walking unaided to his room. A sharp attack of asthma came on at about eight o'clock. After the doctor's visit he asked that word might be sent to his absent children, and soon afterwards, as his breathing became easier, fell asleep, and, in the early hours of the Day of Rest, watched by the tear-dimmed eyes of those he loved, he passed peacefully away "to be with Christ, which is far better."

The Rev. Dr. Waugh, in writing to his son Henry, says:—"It was never my happiness to stand in any pastoral relation to your good father, but I was associated with him for a series of years in our most important Connexional Committees. He belonged to them from 1855 to 1862, and took a prominent part in our Education Committee. He was then in the full vigour of manhood, and could not fail to make his mark in all discussions involving the interests of our Church. His utterances on those occasions displayed

such a grasp of the matter in debate, and such geniality of temper and expression, that he was always heard with respect and pleasure. It was evident that he cherished an intense interest in our Connexional objects, and thoroughly understood them. In the most exciting debates, whether in committee or in District Meeting, he maintained the courtesy of a true Christian gentleman. His sympathy with Methodist ministers was warm and generous, and he took an active part in the preliminary arrangements which led to the formation of the Supernumerary Ministers and Widows Fund. In all these departments of service he did good and faithful work, and helped to lay the foundation of institutions which must long survive. When his working days were past I had a few precious opportunities of visiting him in his own home in Prahran. He was a beautiful specimen of a happy aged Christian. He rejoiced in hope, and held the beginning of his confidence steadfast to the end."

The Rev. J. C. Symons writes thus of him:—"At the first Conference which was held in Sydney, Mr. Rix's name appears as a member of the Connexional Committee, and it so appears each following year, until 1862. He was, during these same eight years, a member of the Educational Committee, at that period a very important body. I well remember that he took a very influential position in those Committees. I was appointed to the Geelong Circuit in 1859, and during the year Mr. Rix was circuit steward. His services in this and in other important positions were of great value to the circuit and to the Church."

The Rev. George Daniel says of him:—"I first met your late revered father upon my arrival in Geelong, to which I was appointed in the year 1857. He was then one of the circuit stewards, and in his official capacity I had necessarily a good deal of intercourse with him, which was always of the most agreeable character. His fine open intelligent face bespoke for him a cordial trust, and made him notable in any company, and, combined with the utmost urbanity and politeness, made one instinctively feel that you were dealing with one of nature's gentlemen.

"In business matters I always found him sagacious

without cunning, liberal without recklessness or extravagance, prompt and decisive without haste or obstinacy; a friend with a warm heart and a willing hand.

"In his religious life he manifested uniformly a fervent zeal and earnestness devoid of extravagance. As I worshipped at that time at Chilwell, with which I was more immediately connected, I felt the value of his co-operation. I was very rarely at any means of grace at which he was not present, and his beaming earnest face and hearty response were often to me a kind of inspiration. His earnest powerful prayers I can never forget. I sometimes saw him placed in trying circumstances in connection with persons who were co-workers in church enterprises, but were not possessed either of his ardent spirit or his liberality of mind, and I often admired his magnanimous and Christian charity in his dealings with such men."

Mr. William Coltman, of Ballarat, writes:—"My recollections of your honoured father as a class-leader and worker in the Church are of the pleasantest kind. Mr. James Campbell, Mr. Sidney Jones, and myself were I believe the first to join the young men's class to which he was appointed, and which used to meet in the vestry of the old Lydiard-street Church at Ballarat, at the close of the Wednesday evening preaching services. I regarded your late father as one eminently fitted for the office of leader. He had a wonderful gift in prayer, being earnest and fervent, and he was evidently well-read in the Bible and our hymn-book, as shown by his ready and apt quotations from either. His choice of hymns betokened great care and wisdom. His favourite hymns were read with such

appreciation of their beauties, and with such unction and power, as to make this exercise a means of grace to us. He showed great knowledge of human nature, spoke wisely and well, and his advice was always good and helpful. We always enjoyed the class-meetings under his wise leadership, and grieved much when he had to leave us, as we felt that we had lost a kind, loving counsellor and guide."

The Rev. H. Greenwood, who regularly visited him the last year or two of his life, says:—"I found him always cheerful, but not demonstrative, having the experience of one fully trusting in Christ and fully resigned to his Heavenly Father. He gave one the impression that his experience was just this—'It is all right; whatever my Father wills is best.' I never heard a word of complaint fall from his lips. He had been a most active man in the duties of life. To him retirement meant more than it does to most people, but he found God's grace sufficient to sustain and comfort him. Gratefully he spoke of God's goodness in the past, and trustfully of that goodness in the future. He knew that at any moment death might come, but there was no anxiety about that, all preparation had been made for the journey. Although his affliction was a trying one, I never heard him express a wish for God to take him from his sufferings to rest—to home. He just waited, glorifying God in his resignation, patience, and hope. His last experience was like a river that flows deeply and calmly into its ocean home. So entered he into his soul's eternal home with the glorified above."

H. F. R.

