

Fairfield's Foremost Citizen



DR. JAMES HENRY CARLISLE

1825—1909

(Note: Information for this too brief sketch was culled from Dr. D. D. Wallace's "History of South Carolina.")

James Henry Carlisle was born at Winnsboro, South Carolina, May 4, 1825, son of William and Mary Ann (Buchanan) Carlisle; the former being born in Antrim, Ireland, July 26, 1797, and died at Winnsboro March 28, 1867. His mother was born Feb. 16, 1801, and died June 19, 1858. The American progenitor of this Carlisle family came to Fairfield, South Carolina, about 1818. Both were buried at Winnsboro, their home for most of their life. Dr. Carlisle's inspiring influence in his boyhood was his mother. The foundation for his education was laid at her knee.

Later he was prepared for college by James W. Hudson, of Mt. Zion Academy, Winnsboro, and entered the sophomore class of South Carolina College in 1842, graduating in 1844 with second honors. In 1853, he was elected professor at Wofford College, succeeding to the presidency in 1875, in which capacity he served for 25 years, although he continued to teach as well. Parents did not send their boys to Spartanburg; they sent them "up to Dr. Carlisle." Upon his passing it was written and said by hundreds that he had been South Carolina's greatest man in the past half century, the greatest agent for good."

Walter Hines Page wrote in the "World's Work" in 1907: "For the last fifty years the dominant figure at Wofford College has been Dr. James H. Carlisle. Without either money or political power, this old man, by the strength of his character, has kept education in its broadest sense alive even in the extreme poverty of the people just after the war, and has saved it from being swamped by the successful commercialism of the present time. I heard one man ask another what he studied under Dr. Carlisle. 'Astronomy,' was the answer. 'Did you learn anything?' the first man asked. 'Yes, I learned to be a man,' the other replied. There is no commercial standard in which the influence of Dr. Carlisle and Wofford College can be measured."

The beloved doctor was deeply religious. Although he and his college suffered terribly from the war and Reconstruction, bitterness was not permitted to enter his soul. No man was a more liberal friend of the negro and few made a more important contribution to the fight to rid the state of the stigma of illiteracy. Temperance had in him a valiant champion and he incorporated in his own life the things he advocated to the state.