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### **IN MEMORIAM \***

**REV. JOHN E. PETERS, SC.D.**

John Ellsworth Peters was born at Newark, N. J., February 8, 1849, and attended the public schools of that city. Further preparation enabled him to enter Princeton College, from which he graduated in the class of 1870. In the fall of the same year, he entered Princeton Theological Seminary, from which he graduated three years later. Licensed by the Presbytery of Newark at the end of his Middle year in the Seminary, he was ordained and installed pastor of the Huntingdon Presbyterian Church by the Presbytery of West Virginia, in 1873. His pastorates were all comparatively short, and followed in close succession, at Corfu, N. Y., and the Second Presbyterian Church, Cedarville, N. J., and as stated supply at Asbury Park, N. J.

In 1882, he returned to Princeton for further study, and after a four-year post-graduate course received the degree of Doctor of Science. He then resumed his ministerial labors, and served as stated supply for brief periods at Mays Landing, Pleasantville, Elwood, and Grace Church, Camden, all of them churches within the bounds of the Presbytery of West Jersey. During the thirty-one years following this ministry, he resided in Camden, N. J., and as far as his health per-

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\* Minutes adopted by the Executive Council.

## REV. S. M. TENNEY, D.D., AND THE ORIGIN OF THE HISTORICAL FOUNDATION OF THE PRESBY- TERIAN AND REFORMED CHURCHES

BY REV. L. J. SHERRILL, D.D.,

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The Historical Foundation of the Presbyterian and Reformed Churches, chartered 1927, has its offices and library in Montreat, North Carolina, the cross-roads of Presbyterianism in the South. Students of Presbyterian history will in the future find this collection of inestimable value. But while exploring the records of other men and other days, not all will recognize the debt of the Church to one man and his family, whose life has gone into the assembling of this material. The story of the origin and development of the Historical Foundation of the Presbyterian and Reformed Churches is almost entirely the story of the efforts of Rev. S. M. Tenney, M.A., D.D., his family, and such friends as he enlisted in the enterprise. Impressed with his devotion to his work and his sacrifice in prosecuting it, the present writer besought of Dr. Tenney the facts regarding the development of the Foundation with especial regard to his part in it, requesting that nothing be held back because of modesty. For the story of his sacrifices as certainly deserves preservation as do the records of any other pioneer in the work of the Church. It was especially desired to get them direct from Dr. Tenney, as has been done.

While pastor of the Second Presbyterian Church of Houston, Texas, 1900 to 1906, Dr. Tenney was a frequenter of second-hand book stores. His interest in the history of Presbyterianism in Texas was quickened by finding a volume that had been owned by Rev. Hugh Wilson, who organized the first Presbyterian church in Texas, that of San Augustine, June 2, 1838. While in the midst of the task of erecting the present building of the Second Church, Dr. Tenney had occa-

sion to locate heirs in order to secure more than sixty quit claim deeds, thus travelling over a large part of Texas. On one of these trips, he found another volume that had been owned by Rev. W. Y. Allen, who had organized the third Presbyterian church in Texas, the First Church of Houston, in 1839. Finances were in such a state that a book from his own library was sold to purchase this volume. The interest thus beginning to be aroused was soon fanned to flame; for while browsing in another second-hand store, he discovered a large bundle of dusty and abused manuscripts, which upon investigation turned out to be the manuscript sermons and lectures of Rev. R. L. Dabney, D.D. He acquired these manuscripts in 1903. He says:<sup>1</sup>

At once, after acquiring these old documents, there was awakened a sense of responsibility, and with it a hope that in some way I might be the means of awakening the Church from her indifference and lack of appreciation of the past. All around me the State was seeking for, and cherishing the papers, etc., of her early heroes and fathers, and here was the Church, that of all others should kindle feelings of gratitude and appreciation, indifferent to the memories of those to whom she was indebted for her life.

Consequently, in 1903, during Synod in Cleburne, Texas, he called together the native Texans at Synod, and urged the organization of a Texas Presbyterian Historical Society. This was done. He was made President, and Rev. Henry Austin, Treasurer. The action was reported to Synod, which body heartily endorsed the new Society.<sup>2</sup> But in spite of earnest effort, little interest could be aroused; at the next meeting the Treasurer reported receipts of \$2.50, "which was never used by the Society; so great was the indifference, it was forgotten."<sup>3</sup>

In 1905, at Dr. Tenney's suggestion, the Synod of Texas celebrated its fiftieth anniversary, meeting in Dr. Tenney's

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<sup>1</sup> Tenney, S. M.: "An Intimate Sketch of the Origin and Development of the Historical Foundation of the Presbyterian and Reformed Churches," p. 2. (A manuscript sent to the present writer.)

<sup>2</sup> *Minutes*, Synod of Texas, 1903, p. 183.

<sup>3</sup> Tenney's Ms., "An Intimate Sketch, etc.," p. 2.

church; where a historical souvenir was presented, prepared at Dr. Tenney's expense; and historical addresses were delivered. In 1906, a little impetus toward better preservation of Synod's records was given by the burning of the records of Paris Presbytery in a private home.<sup>4</sup> In 1914, Dr. Tenney was made chairman of Synod's Committee on Historical Records, which broadened the scope of his activity, but still interest was low.

Meanwhile, finding that so many young men objected to Home Mission work, Dr. Tenney voluntarily resigned his charge in Houston and from 1906 to 1924 was pastor of home mission churches, with salary often six months in arrears. During five years of this time he was also chaplain of the State Prison, with added cares; serving as well on the Board of Managers of the State Hospital for the Insane.<sup>5</sup> But he was determined to refute in his own case the notion that a busy minister with limited income cannot study, nor buy books; and in addition to his historical interests and purchases, during the years 1894 to 1919 his special study was Greek, during which time he compiled a concordance of the Johannine writings with elaborate word studies.<sup>6</sup>

Bit by bit, his collection of historical material was growing. Every purchase was made from his own limited resources.<sup>7</sup> In 1922, Synod gave authority to the Committee on Historical Records to assess each Presbytery for funds to meet cost of stationery, etc., but the amount raised was negligible.<sup>8</sup> In 1923, he secured by gift from a minister in Iowa, a forty-year file of *The Interior* and *The Continent*. The financial status of the Society may be seen by the fact that Dr. Tenney was obliged to pay the cost of transportation of these files (\$37.50) out of his own pocket.<sup>9</sup> In 1923, he also acquired, from Dr. E. M. Green, of Danville, Ky., a complete file of *The Southern Presbyterian*. Soon came a file of *The Southwestern Presby-*

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<sup>4</sup>Tenney, S. M.: "Chronology of the Historical Foundation of the Presbyterian and Reformed Churches" (Ms. sent to the present writer).

<sup>5</sup>Letter from Dr. Tenney, Dec. 10, 1927.

<sup>6</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>7</sup>Letter of Dec. 10, 1927, p. 2.

<sup>8</sup>Ms., "An Intimate Sketch, etc.," p. 5.

<sup>9</sup>Letter from Dr. Tenney, Dec. 26, 1927.

terian, 1869-93; as well as a complete file of *The Christian Index* from Dr. L. Voss, of New Orleans.

By 1923, deafness brought on by exposure during the Great War had increased to such an extent that it became necessary for Dr. Tenney to be honorably retired. "It tore the very cords of the heart asunder . . . day and night the heart was in constant prayer, crying unto heaven to open some place of service, if it be but to wash the feet of the Saints."<sup>10</sup> The deepening interest in historical matters caused him to put forth a Gideon's fleece in the form of a letter to a number of authors, asking their works for a historical collection. The response was prompt and gratifying. Just at this juncture, his class of Princeton Theological Seminary invited him to the class reunion of 1924 as their guest from the extreme Southwest. The invitation was accepted. Already having been encouraged in collecting material, by Dr. L. F. Benson, of Philadelphia, Dr. Tenney went to the reunion, stopping in Philadelphia where Dr. Benson and Miss Turner gave valuable suggestions as to methods, and where Dr. Benson urged the removal of Tenney's collection to a more central location, as an essential to growth.

Texarkana, Ark.-Tex., seemed the logical place. Returning home, the matter was broached to the family. They favored it; but there was no money even for an exploratory trip; but with aid from one of his sons, Dr. Tenney and the son went to Texarkana. After earnest prayer, the decision was made to remove there. But the problem of housing the collection was still unsolved, with no money in sight. Fireproof storage was imperative, for deposits had been accepted on that condition. Unable to pay his expense to Synod, Dr. Tenney sent an appeal for assistance, which was not granted. Let him tell the story:<sup>11</sup>

There was one modern fireproof building [in Texarkana], but how could I hope to get into it? . . . My wife urged me to lease office and go forward by faith. I inquired of the bank officials; rent was high and must needs be paid in advance. Impossible! In a few days a letter came from a good layman

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<sup>10</sup> Ms., "An Intimate Sketch, etc.," p. 3.

<sup>11</sup> Ms., "An Intimate Sketch," p. 5.

with a check enclosed, saying, "Use this any way you wish for your work." It was just \$3.25 less than the amount necessary to pay the first month's rent of office. We moved in and from there was carried on the work of the Synod's Committee on Historical Records, and the Texas Presbyterian Historical Society.

It seemed very daring, as it might be necessary to move out the next month.

It was then that Mrs. Tenney suggested, "Why don't you put your reading of history to practical service; prepare a lecture and go out and deliver it?" He says:<sup>13</sup>

The suggestion took root. In less than a month I made the venture. The return was just five dollars less than a month's rent. Encouraged, the work went on through November and December, 1924.

An article which had been requested by the *Union Seminary Review* (Richmond, Va.) attracted attention at a fortunate time, in the spring of 1925, for due to the Every Member Canvass, it was impossible to expect entry to the churches. Letters and coin cards raised the rent, month by month, while the family lived on the retiring allowance of a Presbyterian minister.

Tenney's work was attracting attention. In May, 1925, the Stated Clerk of the Synod of Kentucky urged that the Society be offered to the Assembly.<sup>14</sup> This letter from Dr. E. E. Smith was an encouragement to Dr. Tenney, as were also the experiences of the winter and spring, 1924-25. Believing that his work needed expanding, in the summer of 1925 Dr. Tenney and his son, Prof. R. P. W. Tenney, made a tour which can only be described in his own words:<sup>15</sup>

Taking advantage of the fact that my son —— had a car, I planned to visit as many of the churches of the Synods of Texas (U. S., U. S. A., and C. P.) as I could through the summer, making record of their official histories, using my son, and delivering lectures to meet expenses. . . . My son received \$25 per month and expenses [out of voluntary cash offerings], while I myself received nothing. We worked day and night, and to

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<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 6.

<sup>15</sup> *Ms.*, "An Intimate Sketch, etc.," p. 6.

meet engagements that had to be prearranged, more than once stayed awake and did copy work practically all night. . . . Everywhere we received the most cordial welcome. Record books were gathered and submitted to us, and all assistance offered. . . . At times, because of accidents about the car, or being unexpectedly forced to a hotel, we came away from a place heavily in debt more than once, but for the fact that my son had a balance in the bank, we would have been unable to get home. These trips usually extended through two or three weeks, during which time we would visit ten or twenty churches, make their records, and travel three or four hundred miles.

At the meeting of the Synod of Texas in August, 1925, Dr. Tenney gave notice that he intended to offer the assets of the Presbyterian Historical Society of Texas to the General Assembly in May, 1926, and asked that Synod commend this offer; also that Synod finance the Presbyterian Historical Society of Texas for a year, until the General Assembly should have time to care for it. It should be remembered that Synod at no time had any holdings in the Society, nor any control over it. The entire assets were the property of Dr. Tenney.<sup>15</sup> It was by the report of Synod's Committee on Historical Records, through an overture, that Synod's attention was called to the intention of Dr. Tenney to offer the Society's collection to the Assembly. Synod "heartily commended the offer, but declined to finance the Society."<sup>16</sup> Dr. Red again came to Dr. Tenney's assistance in an address, as did also Professor Penick, of the University of Texas; appealing for a voluntary offering. To Dr. Tenney's amazement, \$750 was raised by the voluntary offerings of individuals.<sup>17</sup>

Several courts had by this time deposited their records with the Society, and in 1926 overtures came to the Assembly from the Synods of Texas, Oklahoma, and Arkansas, and the Presbyteries of Piedmont and Tuscaloosa, commending the acceptance of Dr. Tenney's offer and the maintenance of the Society.<sup>18</sup> Dr. Tenney could not attend the Assembly of 1926

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<sup>15</sup> Letter from Dr. Tenney, Dec. 26, 1927.

<sup>16</sup> Ms., "An Intimate Sketch, etc.," p. 6.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 7; Letter of Dec. 26, 1927.

<sup>18</sup> *Min. Gen. Assembly, Presb. Ch., U. S., 1923*, p. 51.

because of lack of funds. The Society's cause was committed to the hands of Dr. W. S. Red, commissioner from Central Texas Presbytery to the Assembly. Dr. Red appeared before the Committee on Bills and Overtures and succeeded in getting a favorable report. Correspondence had previously been carried on with Dr. Summey, retiring Moderator, who was expected to be chairman of this committee. "When the report was presented to the Assembly, Dr. Red made the great effort of his life and completely won the mind of the Assembly. The report was adopted."<sup>19</sup> The Assembly accepted the offer of the assets of the Society, and appointed a committee "to study the whole matter and report plans for the establishment and maintenance of the Permanent Historical and Research Department;" and the Executive Committee of Publication was appointed to act as custodian, and arrange a stipend for Dr. Tenney for a year.<sup>20</sup> This was the first assurance of compensation for his work in the Society, that Dr. Tenney had ever received since its formation in 1903.

The year 1926-27 was largely spent in building up the collection. Scottish church literature was added, together with many rare books and pamphlets; about 1,250 copies of minutes of Synods and Presbyteries were received; the complete files of records of two-thirds of the Synods of the Presbyterian Church U. S. were deposited, with many records of Presbyteries, and of local churches. Historical and biographical works were constantly being added, and the files of church papers were being built up. Dr. Tenney has consistently shown keen historical sense in getting files of these weekly publications; for historical research is increasingly depending upon these contemporary journalistic and newspaper sources for intimate and detailed accounts of events whose record would otherwise be hopelessly lost. Before the day of printed minutes of church courts, many important documents were published only in the weekly papers, and can be recovered nowhere else, not even in the official files of the courts. Historians with the patience to use them, will find in these files

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<sup>19</sup> Ms., "An Intimate Sketch, etc.," p. 8.

<sup>20</sup> *Min. Gen. Assembly, Presb. Ch., U. S., 1926*, p. 51.

a wealth of information nowhere else obtainable, bearing upon all phases of the church's life.

In the fall of 1926, Dr. Tenney sent overtures to all the Synods and Presbyteries of the Presbyterian Church, U. S., to test the feeling before the Assembly might act in 1927. The remarkable response convinced the committee (appointed in 1926) that the time was ripe for action. The report of this *ad interim* committee recommended acceptance of the collection, the establishment of the Historical Foundation of the Presbyterian and Reformed Churches, the appointment of an Executive Committee, the acceptance of the offer of the Mountain Retreat Association to house the collection in fireproof quarters at Montreat without cost, the election of Dr. Tenney as Curator for three years, and provision for financing the Foundation by a membership tax of one cent per member throughout the Assembly. The report of the committee was adopted, as well as the constitution proposed for the Foundation.<sup>a</sup>

The collection, forming a carload of material, was moved from Texarkana to Montreat, September 1, 1927, and is now permanently housed there in ample, fireproof quarters through the kindness of Dr. R. C. Anderson. Mr. R. E. Magill, of Richmond, and the Committee of Publication have actively assisted in the financing. Friends too numerous to mention have both contributed material, and aided by writing and speaking for the Foundation and the earlier Society. Most of the Synods and Presbyteries of the Presbyterian Church, U. S., have appointed Historical Committees to coöperate with the Foundation; Synodical and Presbyterial Auxiliaries also have corresponding committees. Overtures were sent to the Associate Reformed Presbyterian Synod, and to the General Assembly of the Cumberland Presbyterian Church, and both these bodies are represented in the Executive Committee, and have deposited many volumes of records.

The library now contains records of 66% of the Synods and 40% of the Presbyteries of the Presbyterian Church, U. S.,

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<sup>a</sup> Com. report, and constitution, in *Min. Gen. Assembly, Presb. Ch., U. S., 1927*, pp. 143-147.

sessional records of many churches, minutes of the Assemblies of the Presbyterian Church in the United States, of the Presbyterian Church in the U. S. A., and of the United Presbyterian Church of North America; files, complete or incomplete, of the minutes of the Cumberland Presbyterian Assembly, General Synod of the Reformed Church in America, and the Reformed Church in the United States, General Assemblies of Canada, Ireland, and Brazil; Synod of Mexico, and other higher courts; perfect files of about forty church papers and missionary periodicals and partial files of about 100 others; numerous volumes of history of various branches of the Presbyterian and Reformed Churches throughout the world; histories of Synods, Presbyteries, and local churches; biographies; material on liturgy and hymnology; various editions and translations of the Confession and Catechisms; rare volumes and pamphlets; extensive catalogue files of educational institutions; photographs, cuts; manuscripts of Daniel Baker, R. L. Dabney, T. E. Peck, Samuel McKinney, Rufus W. Bailey, and others. In all, about 4,000 volumes bound, and 8,500 unbound, together with volumes of records and manuscripts."

All this material has been collected by Dr. Tenney, at his own expense, by dint of denial of his own family. Such aid as was given has been sketched. He had no salary until the action of the Assembly of 1926. No one can ever know the full story of the sacrifices of this family, in order to bring the material together. Mrs. Tenney for a time supplemented the retiring allowance by her own outside employment, all the while doing her own work, even the ordinary washing. Capable of earning her own income, she prefers to devote all her time to the library, assisting her husband. In order to be of more efficient assistance, she has learned book repairing and record keeping, and now has learned Spanish in order to translate the Mexican records and papers. As if this were not enough, Prof. Warren W. Tenney has also given his own service without stint. For the Tenneys, it has been literally a labor of love not only, but of self-denial and sacrifice;

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"Ms., "An Intimate Sketch, etc.," p. 10.

a pioneer work in saving the history of the Southwestern and other pioneers of the Cross. The Church has at last seen the results of this labor, after the collection was assembled together at the cost of a whole family's toil for twenty-five years, and has said, "It is good. We will accept it." It remains to be seen whether they will duly honor the man and those who have helped him.

For every particle of this collection, costing thousands of dollars," wrought out by a now aged minister's toil by day and by night, made possible by the willing sacrifice of his family, *has been given by him to the General Assembly without one cent of compensation.*" They were the private property of an individual, and as such were invoiced and delivered to the Assembly, this invoice later being regarded as a legal transfer of all holdings of Dr. Tenney and the Presbyterian Historical Society of Texas." *In return, he has not even the assurance that he will be allowed to guard his own treasures for more than three years.*" It is unthinkable that when these facts are known, the Church will do anything other than retain him as Curator as long as his hand still has its skill, and his heart the urgent desire to gather up the fragments of the Church's story, that nothing be lost.

The library not only provides a place of deposit for valuable records, but also acts as a research department. Only those who have had occasion to draw upon its resources can appreciate the unfailing courtesy of Dr. Tenney, and his intimate knowledge of the Church's history. Nor can words quite convey an adequate idea of such a passionate interest in his work that the beholder feels constrained to say, "God spoke to this man." The Church is richer for such lives and only impoverishes herself if she fails to utilize them.

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<sup>22</sup> Letter from Dr. Tenney, Dec. 10, 1927.

<sup>23</sup> *Min. Gen. Assembly, Presb. Ch., U. S., 1927*, p. 143. Letter of Dec. 10, 1927.

<sup>24</sup> Letter of Dec. 26, 1927.

<sup>25</sup> *Min. Gen. Assembly, Presb. Ch., U. S., 1927*, p. 144. The condition that he be employed for the three years as Curator was "put into the offer at the suggestion of others." Letter of Dec. 10, 1927.