

BIOGRAPHICAL RECORD

OF THE

OFFICERS AND GRADUATES

OF THE

Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute,

1824-1886.

EDITED BY

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SECRETARY OF THE ASSOCIATION OF GRADUATES, 1872-1886.

WITH AN INTRODUCTION

BY

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United States and doubtless in the world. Probably fully 4,000 students graduated during his Presidency, and among them some of the most eminent men of the country. In the language of a well known publicist, "Union College is emphatically of his own formation; he came to it in its poverty and infancy, and has raised it to wealth and reputation." In 1854 occurred the semi-centennial anniversary of his Presidency, when there came together to do him honor between 600 and 700 of the men who had graduated under him. Dr. Nott was an earnest advocate of temperance, and published at Albany, in 1847, "Lectures on Temperance." Although he has written largely, and on many subjects, his publications are confined principally to occasional addresses and "Counsels to Young Men," (New York), and a discourse delivered before the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church. He devoted much thought and attention to the laws of heat, and, besides obtaining some thirty or more patents for applications of heat to steam engines, the economical use of fuel, &c.; he was the inventor of a stove bearing his name and very extensively used. Dr. Nott stood pre-eminent as an educator, and was universally esteemed, venerated, and loved by the many who enjoyed his teachings and counsels. His labors in the temperance cause, both by voice and pen, and his many and long-continued experiments on heat, with the view of applying it to useful and economical purposes for human benefit, if not as successful as he had hoped, evinced the fertility of an intellect which loved to rise itself for the good of others. As a preacher, his style of thought, his manner, his elocution were all his own—the chief characteristic being his impressiveness. In 1805, the College of New Jersey conferred upon him the title of D. D., and in 1828 he received the title of LL. D. He married the daughter of Rev. Joel Benedict, D. D., of Plainfield, Conn., under whose instruction in early life he pursued his classical and mathematical studies.

NATHAN SIDNEY SMITH BEMAN, D. D., the fourth president of the Institute, was born in that part of Canaan, N. Y., which is now called New Lebanon, on Sunday, November 26th, 1785. He was a son of Samuel and Silence (Douglass) Beman, his paternal ancestors being of German and his maternal ancestors of Scotch origin. When he was four or five years of age his parents re-

moved to Hampton, Washington County, N. Y., then called Greenfield. His father was a gentleman of the old school, who was strongly attached to ancient customs in dress, and to the day of his death, which occurred in 1845, he wore the short breeches and knee buckles and queue of old times. He was a man of good intellect and business capacity. He was a communicant of the Protestant Episcopal Church, and his funeral was attended by the Right Rev. Dr. Onderdonk, then bishop of New York. Nathan commenced his preparation for college, in company with the late Hon. Rollin C. Mallory, at Poultney, Vt., in 1801, with Mr. Bolles, an eminent teacher, a graduate of the University of Dublin. In 1802 he went under the tuition of a private instructor at Williamstown, Mass, then at the grammar school in that place. He entered Williams College in 1803, but at the close of his freshman year took a dismission, and spent the following year in teaching at Fairhaven, Vt. In the summer of 1804 he entered Middlebury College, graduating in 1807. His classmates were Ira Bascom, D. A. A. Buck, Miles Purdy, Stephen Royce, William Slade and Oliver Stewart. Four of this class, including Dr. Beman, became distinguished men, and perhaps in no one class of the college have so many attained eminence as the class of 1807. Mr. Buck was long a member of Congress; Mr. Royce was Chief Justice of the Supreme Court and Governor of Vermont, and Mr. Slade was a member of Congress and also Governor.

After graduating he became preceptor, in the autumn of 1807, of Lincoln Academy at Newcastle, Maine, where he remained more than two years, at the same time pursuing the study of theology with Rev. Kiah Bailey. He was licensed to preach June 14, 1809, by the Lincoln and Kennebec Association. About the same time he was appointed tutor at Middlebury and entered upon the duties of his appointment; but receiving an earnest call from the Third Presbyterian Church in Portland, Me., to which he had preached a few times, he resigned the tutorship and was ordained pastor of that church March 14, 1810. Rev. Kiah Bailey preached the sermon. His health failed in a year or two, with decided symptoms of consumption, and in October, 1812, he was dismissed. He immediately went south and took up his residence in Hancock County, Georgia, at a place afterward called Mount Zion, where he organized a

Presbyterian Church and established an academy. Under his superintendence, which continued about ten years, the academy acquired a high reputation and attracted a large number of students.

In 1818 he was elected President of Franklin College, at Athens, Ga. He accepted the office, but held it for only one year, and then returned to his academy at Mount Zion. Coming north in the summer of 1822, he preached on the first Sunday in September in the First Presbyterian Church in Troy, N. Y., and by invitation of the officers continued to supply the pulpit until the following November, when he was called to the pastorate. He accepted the call, and was installed June 14, 1823. Rev. Nathaniel S. Prime preached the sermon. In this pastorate he continued just forty years, during which time he received into the church 1,840 members, of which twenty-six became clergymen. He was dismissed June 17, 1863, at his own request, and the church voted him a life annuity of \$1,000. He died at Carbondale, Ill., August 6, 1871, at the advanced age of eighty-six years.

In 1824, he was elected a trustee of Middlebury College, and continued so until his death—having been a member eighteen months longer than any of his associates. In 1846 he was elected President of the college, but declined the office. He received the degree of doctor of divinity, from Williams College in 1824, and of doctor of laws from Middlebury College in 1852. His earliest publication was a sermon, occasioned by the death of Rev. Oliver Hulburt, preached at Waynesboro, Georgia, November, 1814, and prefixed to a posthumous collection of Mr. Hulburt's sermons. In 1825, he published "Four Sermons on the Doctrine of the Atonement," in a duodecimo volume. He also compiled the "Church Psalmist," a collection of hymns for public worship. A large number of his sermons have been published separately.

Dr. Beman was one of the Vice Presidents of the Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute from 1842 to 1845, and was the President from the latter year to 1865. During these twenty-three years he was also a member of the board of trustees. Brought thus in connection with many young men, at a formative period of their lives, he never neglected any proper opportunity to impress upon them the duty that they owed to themselves, to their

parents or guardians, and to society at large, to increase in wisdom and knowledge, and to show by a studious and honorable deportment, a full appreciation of the privileges to which they were admitted.

The early life of Dr. Beman gave promise of a brilliant future, which his manhood more than fulfilled. For nearly sixty years he stood at his post, full of vigor of mind and strength of body, and then retired to die in a western home attended by the careful ministrations of a beloved daughter. He was a master mind, having a reputation as wide as the limits of his country as a leader among men. A quarter of a century ago a discerning writer said of him, "If ambition for political distinction had been his ruling passion, he could not have failed by his own commanding intellect to have risen to the highest honors, and that, too, without the aid of these petty means and miserable shifts that some little minds resort to 'to be the things they are not.'" His remarkable prophecies as foreshadowed in several of his Thanksgiving sermons, indicated full well the power he would have exerted as a statesman in public life. Some of his discourses were characterized as intensely political, but he always claimed the right of the pulpit to attack evil whether in church or state, but it was only in Thanksgiving sermons that he ventured upon political subjects.

As a pulpit orator he had few superiors—calm, dignified, earnest—oftentimes intensely earnest, but never nervously impassioned—always keeping control of himself and his audience. He was not always confined to manuscript; some of his extempore discourses were his best. His celebrated sermon on the French revolution, delivered before many audiences, was never committed to writing in form, but bore evidence of great thought and was logically divided into divisions. It occupied two hours in its delivery, and never wearied, but enchained the fixed attention of his audience throughout. He was in truth one of the theological and intellectual giants of his time.

He was to those familiar with him a man of rare social qualities, although at times peculiar. He was misunderstood by some, who thought him haughty, cold, over-bearing, tyrannical; yet he was kind, loving, but the most sensitive of men, touched to the very life by a "slight, and pleased beyond

measure by a kindness." His native goodness stood transparent to those who knew him best, and all admired his commanding abilities, notwithstanding his oftentimes cold exterior.

HON. JOHN F. WINSLOW, the fifth president of the Institute, was born in Bennington, Vt., November 10th, 1810. He is the descendant of original New England stock, Edward Winslow, the first of the family in this country, and Governor of Plymouth Colony, and his brother Gilbert, being among the original passengers by the historic Mayflower.

Captain Richard Winslow, of the sixth generation in this country, was born in Lyme, Conn. He married in 1804, at Hartford, Mary Corning Seymour, and soon after moved to Albany, where he resided all of his life, with the exception of six or seven years passed in Bennington, Vt., previously to 1815. A large family was the result of this union, John Flack, the subject of this biography, being the fourth child. He was educated at the select schools of Albany, pursuing his studies till 1827, when, declining a professional in favor of a business career, he entered a commercial house as a clerk. After a few years he secured a place in a commission house in New York City, where he remained till his majority, when he was sent by his principals to New Orleans to establish a branch office. After a twelve-month in the South, the climate being uncongenial, he returned to New York, and in 1831 was charged with the control of the works and business of the New Jersey Iron Company, as managing agent, resident at Boston. This connection lasted two years, during which time the young superintendent thoroughly mastered all the details of the important industry. In 1833 he turned the exhaustive knowledge thus acquired to personal account by engaging in the production of pig iron in Bergen and Sussex counties, New Jersey. He continued in this enterprise till 1837, when he formed a connection, which lasted under varied firm names for thirty years, with one of the conspicuous promoters of local enterprise, the late Erastus Corning, of Albany.

The partnership of Corning & Winslow, controlling both the Albany and the Rensselaer Iron Works, was one of the largest producers of railroad and other iron ever established in America, and probably held a higher position in the industry and exerted a more pronounced effect upon the domestic market than any other.