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THE SEMI-CENTENNIAL OF THE PRESBYTERIAN
HISTORICAL SOCIETY.

By the REV. JOHN PEACOCK, D. D.

THE Fiftieth Anniversary of the Presbyterian Historical Society was celebrated in Witherspoon Building, Philadelphia, on December 2, 1902. At 2:30 P. M., a meeting was held in the small auditorium. The Rev. Henry C. McCook, D. D., Sc. D., LL.D., the President of the Society, was in the Chair. At the request of the President the audience arose, and the Rev. David Steele, Jr., D. D., LL.D., of the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America (General Synod), offered prayer.

The President called upon the Rev. Samuel T. Lowrie, D. D., the Corresponding Secretary of the Society, to express the welcome of the Society to those who came to join in this celebration.

Dr. Lowrie said:

“Our Society was founded fifty years ago at a meeting of the General Assembly in Charleston, S. C. Its proper anniversary, therefore, coincides with the meeting of that body in May; and this has had some sort of celebration now and then by meetings held in the interest of the Society where the General Assembly

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tears and sighs, and adopted by the whole Assembly rising to their feet, the unprecedented scene being closed by a prayer in which the oldest minister present gave utterance to the feelings which swelled every heart.

Mr. Chairman, one great object of our Society is to preserve in the minds of succeeding generations the services of men like this minister of Christ, whose character and work were so much appreciated by his contemporaries, and thus to stimulate others to like zeal and to inspire them for similar services.

We are confident that the proceeding in which we are now engaged will exert no inconsiderable influence in the promotion of this object.

We are all placed under great obligations to Mr. Alexander Van Rensselaer, of this city, by the gift which he has made to the Society, of a most excellent portrait of his father which he has given me the privilege of unveiling. (The portrait was here unveiled.)

He was good enough to select as the artist Mr. David Neal; a man who has won distinguished honors in his profession during his long residence in Munich, and who has, in this country, lately added to his already great reputation by producing most admirable portraits of the late Prof. William Henry Green, of Princeton Theological Seminary, the late Prof. John T. Duffield, of Princeton University, the late Dr. George T. Purves, of the Fifth Avenue Church in New York City, and the Hon. White-law Reid.

It affords me the greatest pleasure, in behalf of Mr. Alexander Van Rensselaer, to present this portrait of his father to The Presbyterian Historical Society.

In accepting the gift on behalf of the Society, the Rev. Louis F. Benson, D. D., thus responded:

Mr. Chairman and Doctor Hodge; Ladies and Gentlemen:

It is more blessed (we all know it) to give than to receive. It happens, however, that in the make-up of our nature Providence has left ample room for very comfortable satisfactions on the part also of the recipient of a gift. To give is the gracious thing. But gratitude, none the less, is a grace. It is the

acceptance of this gift, and the expression of such satisfactions, that is the part assigned me by the Society.

Surely it was a gracious purpose that conceived a gift so appropriate and so welcome. Surely it was the happiest of inspirations that thus associates with this anniversary the face (I had almost said the living presence) of him who founded the Society fifty years ago. What other face could have been so welcome here and now?

We have not waited until now to learn what Doctor Van Rensselaer was and what he did. We have counted it our office, a special function of our Society, to keep green the memory of the just; and certainly we would not overlook him who stands so close to our own history. We have cherished his memory and felt, even, that we might claim some share in possessing it. We have been accustomed to look up to him as our Founder, our Progenitor—and we have thought ourselves well-born.

This Society, Dr. Hodge, accepts very gratefully the portrait of Doctor Van Rensselaer which you have presented to us in the name of Doctor Van Rensselaer's son. We shall give to the portrait that central place of honor upon our walls, which corresponds to the place Doctor Van Rensselaer himself holds in our history and in our reverent regard. And will you suffer me, sir, to add, in my own behalf, that I do not think the time will ever come when the place of supremacy given to this portrait will be contested by the effigy of a better gentleman, a more loyal Churchman, or a more devoted Christian.

At this point, the Chairman read the following letter to Mr. Harold Peirce, chairman of the Committee of Arrangements, from the Governor-elect of Pennsylvania, the Hon. Samuel W. Pennypacker, President of the Historical Society of Pennsylvania:

1540 N. 15TH ST., PHILA., DEC. 1, 1902.

My Dear Sir: I much regret that an earlier and important engagement to which duty calls me, will prevent me from being present at your meeting to-morrow evening. I congratulate you upon the past achievement and promise of future usefulness of your Society. The records of that force which overthrew the monarchy in England and did so much during our Revolution to establish a republic in America, cannot be too carefully preserved.

Wishing for your celebration all success. I am,

Sincerely yours,

SAM'L W. PENNYPACKER.