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I.—LITERARY.

HISTORICAL SKETCH OF UNION THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY.

BY PROF. W. W. MOORE.

I. THE BEGINNING, 1812-1823.

The Presbyterian Church in America was composed originally of emigrants from Great Britain and Ireland, and for a number of years the ministers of their various congregations were drawn from beyond the seas. As the church grew, however, and the population of the country increased, the supply thus obtained proved to be inadequate, and the necessity for a native ministry became more and more apparent. Academies and colleges were accordingly established from time to time during the eighteenth century at various places, such as Princeton, Lexington and Hampden-Sidney; and the candidates educated in these institutions received their theological training from the president of the college, when he chanced to be a minister (as was commonly the case), or from other approved divines here and there throughout the country. But not until 1812, the year of our second war with England, did the church establish an institution to be devoted exclusively to theological education. In that year Princeton Seminary was founded, with the Rev. Archibald Alexander (formerly President of Hampden-Sidney College) as its organizer and first professor. In the same memorable year the Synod of Virginia adopted the plan of a Seminary to be located within her bounds, inaugurated measures to raise funds for its sup-

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"Remember them . . . which spake unto you the word of God; and considering the issue of their life, imitate their faith."—Heb. 13:7, R. V.

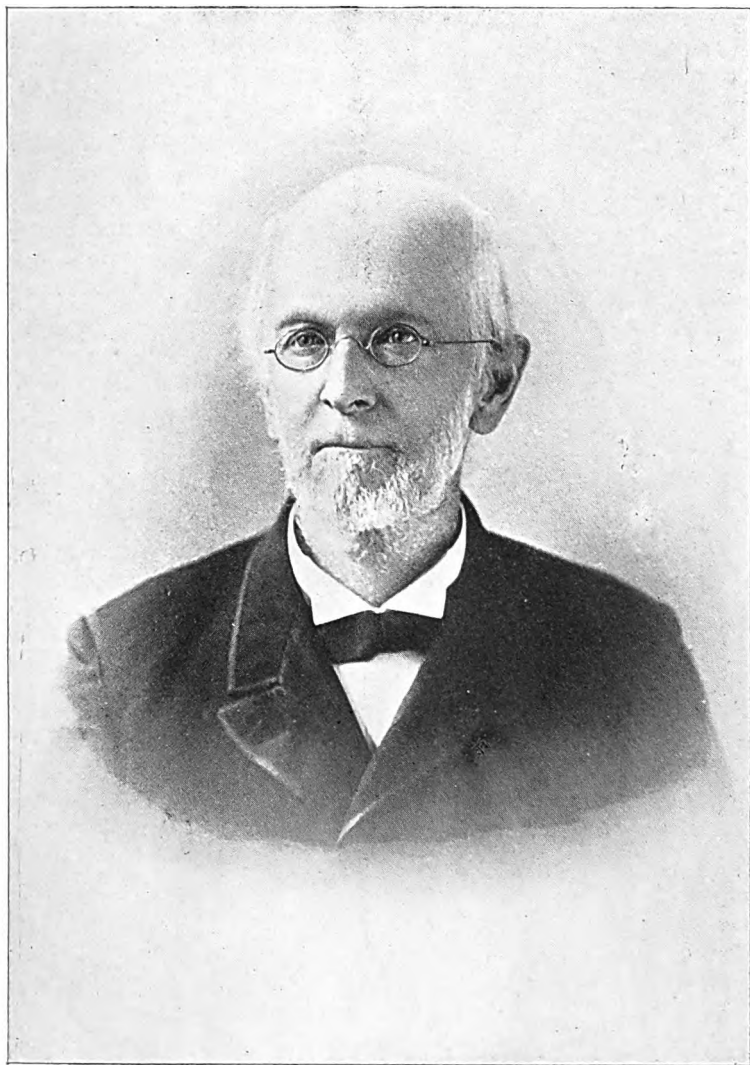
A seminary is, etymologically, a place where seed is sown, a seed-plot. The daily work of a teacher should meet its description in the words, "A sower went forth to sow." It was the pre-eminently seminal character of Dr. Peck's instruction that made him to the writer and not a few others the prince of teachers. The thoughts he cast into our minds were *semina rerum*. He gave us not corded oak, but sprouting acorns with which to grow our own timber.

One of the most distinguished graduates of Union Seminary is quoted as saying to a friend recently, "After I got into the pastorate and began to ask myself, why do I pursue this course of action? where did I get the germ of this thought? I found that I owe more to Dr. Peck than to any of my professors."

A seed is life in a compacted form, a germ with just enough assimilable matter packed about it to start its growth, and no more. It is not surprising, therefore, to find that the most marked quality of Dr. Peck's style is *precision*.

Dr. Latimer, soon after his advent to "the Hill," expressed astonishment that a man preaching without notes should be able to embody his thoughts in sentences so free from either redundancy or defect. This quality was noticeable not only in the pulpit and class-room and in his published writings, but in his table-talk as well. While he was his grandfather's assistant as librarian of the College of South Carolina, he was in the habit of transcribing page after page from favorite authors with whose writings he had become familiar through daily contact. I once heard him allude to this early habit disparagingly, as a waste of time, but, doubtless, "he builded better than he knew," and the labor thus expended had its unrecognized reward in the clearness and accuracy with which he expressed his thoughts.

Dr. Peck was not a popular preacher, in the accepted sense.



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There was, ordinarily, too much strong meat in his sermons for the digestion of babes ; but no member of the seminary faculty was heard more gladly by the students. His sermons generally opened with a careful exegesis of the text, followed by an elaborate and orderly exposition of the principles involved, which were driven home to the heart and conscience with great power in a few practical inferences. He used to tell the students to put plenty of powder behind their balls, and he exemplified this maxim in his own preaching. He always gathered an abundant supply of fuel before he applied the match. Occasionally there was a super-abundance of material which tended to choke the flame. At times the temperature of his thought would rise so high before he closed as to melt both his own heart and the hearts of his hearers and cause them to flow together in streams of glowing emotion. Who that heard them delivered can ever lose the impression made by such of his sermons as *Herodias and John the Baptist* ; *The Syrophenician Woman* ; "*Brethren pray for us,*" and others that will spring to the memory of alumni of Union Seminary!

As to the staple of his preaching, one sentence from his review of the General Assembly of 1856 will suffice: "There is not a little of what is called fine preaching which is not worth the money expended upon the sexton, fuel and light, simply for the reason that it is not the gospel." [Miscellanies, Vol. II, p. 298.]

Dr. Peck's character was so earnest and deep, so free from tinge of irreverence or suggestion of trifling, that those who came in contact with him only when he was dealing directly with the great principles of righteousness, sometimes received the impression of a rather forbidding austerity. But he had, in fact, a lively sense of humor and a spirited wit, which were held in with bit and bridle in the pulpit, and generally in the class-room, but to which he often gave full rein in his table talk. Those of us who had the privilege of sitting at his board will never forget the bursts of merriment that overflowed us all, when Mrs. Peck, in mock solemnity, would interlard her conversation with amusing variations of the classical quotations and Latin maxims so often heard from the Doctor's lips. The mingled aptness and inaptness of a quotation would often constitute a double witticism, and the grave theological professor would surrender himself to uncontrollable

laughter, into which we were all irresistibly drawn. Mrs. Peck once said to a college student who was somewhat elated at his success in tickling the Doctor's risibles, "Now, Joe, don't you be too much puffed up by making Dr. Peck laugh. Anybody can do that."

Not only did he fall an easy prey to laughter at the humorous sallies of others, but his own wit always won triumphs when it entered the lists. In his conversation at home almost every subject discussed was lighted up with that soft glow of a kindly humor, into which there flashed now and again sudden gleams of a wit that was terrible in its exposure of sophistries and shams. If anyone is skeptical as to Dr. Peck's powers along this line, let him read the review of Bushnell's *God in Christ* in the second volume of his *Miscellanies*.

The preponderating element in Dr. Peck's character, next to and growing out of his love to God was his loyalty to truth. No one who knew him could doubt that he belonged in spirit to the noble army of martyrs. "For the word of God and for the testimony of Jesus Christ," he would have marched with undaunted courage to the stake. His attitude towards the age-long conflict for the truth is vividly set forth in his inaugural discourse into the professorship of church history: "A great deal of the common talk about the absence of prejudice and sectarian partiality comes from those who do not feel interest enough in the glory of God, or in the salvation of man, to take sides, and they are bigoted for indifference. But I envy not the man who can read the record of such a battle of the ages without enlisting himself on one side or the other; without feelings of anger or pity, or sadness, or exultation, as the scenes, one after another, pass before him." [*Miscellanies*, Vol. II, p. 126.]

Dr. Peck, whilst he had very definite views of truth and expressed these views in the terms of strong conviction, was a man of great modesty and humbleness of mind. These traits of his character were so marked as to lend some color of plausibility to the statement, now going the rounds of the religious press, that "no one ever heard the first personal pronoun, either singular or plural, fall from his lips in preaching, or ever saw it appear in his writings." The refutation of this statement may be found in any one of the sermons published in full in the *Miscellanies*. Dr. Peck was too modest to be guilty of this kind of affectation. The pride he most de-

spised was "the pride that apes humility."

Not even so brief a sketch as this should close without mention of that subtle quality of character which is as a girdle to all the rest, binding them together about the personality of the possession like a garment that is symmetrical and unimpending. It is the quality which harmonizes all the gifts, intellectual and moral, and whose product is poise. This quality Dr. Peck possessed in a pre-eminent degree. His mind was not so massive as Dr. Dabney's, nor so brilliant as Dr. Thornwell's, but was, perhaps, in the equilibrium of its faculties superior to either.

One of the brightest men ever graduated by Hampden-Sidney College, now a professor in a Southern university, used to take knotty problems encountered in the philosophy course to Dr. Peck, and was delighted and astonished at the luminous off-hand exposition called forth by his questions.

Dr. Dabney once said to the writer: "The Seminary has lost nothing by my removal to Texas. Dr. Peck is a master in Church history, but a still greater master in theology. There is no profounder theologian in the church than he."

The present distinguished Professor of the Hebrew Language and Literature in Union Seminary has been heard to say more than once that Dr. Peck's highest gifts were in the line of exegesis.

Dr. C. R. Vaughan, in his excellent sketch, declares: "As an expositor of truth, as an exegete of Scripture, as a philosophic student of history, he was probably without a rival in his day." [Peck's Miscellanies, Vol. III, p. 17.]

These high testimonies bear witness to the breadth and balance of his mind.

Asheville, N. C.

