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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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On taking the chair, Mr. Converse gracefully referred to Dr. McCook as an acknowledged leader or general who had turned over to himself as corporal, the pleasant duties of the evening. He said: "It is my pleasure and desire to attend any of the commands given by him. It is certainly a satisfaction that I am able to do anything to promote the usefulness and efficiency of The Presbyterian Historical Society."

The Rev. Edward B. Coe, D. D., Senior Pastor of the Collegiate Church, New York, Reformed Church in America, then offered prayer.

At the close of the prayer, selections from Psalm lxxii, Rous's Version, were sung, Elder Samuel G. Scott, of the Tabernacle Presbyterian Church, Philadelphia, leading.

The Rev. Theodore L. Cuyler, D. D., of Brooklyn, then delivered the following address:

Brethren and Associates: "There is no place like home." I thank you for this kind greeting. It is sweet as the kiss from my dear old mother, the Presbyterian Church. Some weeks ago, when I was invited to come here and be with you this evening, I thought it would be next to impossible: I thought I could not risk such a trip. The thought of the journey shocked me—but I felt the shock in the knees and not in my theology. It is worth the journey from Brooklyn to come and be with you—to be with such friends to-night. And when I learned that a portrait of Dr. Van Rensselaer was to be unveiled and presented here this evening, I felt that I must be here. I knew him well, and loved him with all my heart. He was a nobleman. He was of aristocratic lineage. He was the crown prince of Presbyterianism. He was a Presbyterian to the very roots of his being.

I wish that now, at a time when so much of the talent and culture of the Universities and colleges are predominant, the example of that man might be studied and emulated.

When Dr. Van Rensselaer graduated from Yale he came into great wealth. He was set apart for the profession of the law. But there was money in that. He said: "This don't suit me. I don't want it. I am only satisfied with the service of the Lord Jesus Christ." He entered the ministry and continued in it with a career that an arch-angel might have envied.

Brethren, this is most delightful thus meeting. The old Presbyterian heart beats warm and strong to-night. During the fifty years of the existence of the Historical Society many notable events have occurred. For instance, in that part of it in which I have my own birth-right, here in Philadelphia, one of the most notable events was that re-union of the old and new school of 1870. Brethren, it was my privilege to be one of that memorable assemblage in the old church in Washington Square.

Another thing in the closing year of this half century has warmed my old heart. I allude to the happy issue of the long agitation for a revision of the beloved and venerated Westminster Confession of Faith. You will, I know, allow the freedom of speech for one moment more. There has been a great deal of work going on among the Presbyterians and a great deal of struggling; and the outcome of all this long threshing is a good round bushel of orthodox grain. During all this progression and change we retain truths worth having and get rid of a little infelicitous phraseology not worth keeping. Our Presbyterianism is in no more danger of lurching into radicalism than our staid ancestor William Penn on City Hall is in danger of dancing a hornpipe.

I feel, my dear brethren, that I must stand to my assurance that if I came here to-night I must utter a few words to my beloved relatives in this household. The first half century in the history of the Historical Society comes to its termination. The curtain that hides the next half century is just rising; and when it rises let our triumphant church band march shoulder to shoulder to the grand old music of Westminster and Heidelberg. Let us understand that Presbyterianism means conservatism—and conservatism does not mean stagnation but healthy and aggressive progress.

Next to God let us think of the nation. Let us remember that the claims of our country connect with the claims of our beloved Lord and Master; and what this country wants most to-night is Bible conscience among all people, and good old Presbyterianism to put more iron in the nation's blood.

With the highest and holiest mission that might stir the envy of the angels—the conversion of souls to Jesus Christ—let that

curtain rise. Let it rise! Methinks I see it swinging up and catch glimpses of the faces of Livingston, the Alexanders, Chas. Hodge, Albert Barnes, John Chambers, Cortlandt Van Rensselaer, and around them gathered the foreign missionaries who have dared and died for Jesus; and above them the countless crowd of witnesses. Listen! Listen! from above all breaks that majestic voice in tones of thunder to the children of Israel that they go forward! forward! forward!

Dr. Cuyler was followed by the Rev. Henry van Dyke, D. D., Moderator of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America, who delivered the following address upon

THE VALUE OF HISTORY.

That most suggestive critic, Thomas De Quincey, divided literature into two great departments: the literature of knowledge and the literature of power. History, if it be true and wise, belongs to both departments. It aims, first, to widen our field of knowledge by bringing before us the vanished past; rebuilding, as if by magic, cities and civilizations that have long since crumbled into ruins; tracing again the pathways of human races and tribes across the unrecording deserts; calling back to visionary life the faces and the forms of great men lost in the common dust of earth; and making silent voices speak to us again. In this great service history addresses itself to the intellect alone. It feeds that deep hunger of the mind which we call curiosity. It adds immensely to the range of things that men may know.

But the Muse of History has never been content to rest in this service to knowledge, any more than the Muse of Poetry has been content to rest in a mere service to beauty. Beyond the presentation of the facts of the past, history has been impelled by the vital spirit which animates it, to aim at the exercise of power in the present. Not merely to add to the things that men may know, but to make this addition count for something in lessons of warning, of encouragement, of reverence, of fear, of admiration, and of hope: this is the ethical impulse, deeper far than mere curiosity, which inspires and sustains the patient