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MEMORIAL OF WM. S. PLUMER, D. D., LL. D.

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WILLIAM SWAN PLUMER was born in Greensburg (now Darlington), Pennsylvania, July 26th, 1802. In the nineteenth year of his age he was a pupil of the venerable Dr. McElhenny, of Lewisburg, West Virginia, with whom he pursued his studies until he was prepared to enter Washington College, Lexington, Virginia, where he graduated. He received his theological training at Princeton Seminary; was licensed to preach by the Presbytery of New Brunswick in 1826, and was ordained by the Presbytery of Orange in 1827. After several years of evangelical labor in North Carolina, he returned to Virginia, and after a short term of service in Briery church he was called to Petersburg in 1831. He removed to Richmond in 1834 to become the pastor of the First Presbyterian church. In the thirteenth year of his labors in Richmond he accepted a call to the Franklin Street church, Baltimore, of which he had pastoral charge from 1847 to 1854, when he was elected to the Chair of Didactic and Pastoral Theology in the Western Theological Seminary at Alleghany, Pennsylvania. Owing to complications caused by the civil war his connexion with the Seminary having been severed, in 1862, he supplied the pulpit of the Arch Street church, Philadelphia, until 1865, when he accepted a call to the Second Presbyterian church of Pottsville, Pennsylvania. In 1867 he was elected to the Professorship of Didactic and Polemic Theology in Columbia Seminary, and after filling that chair for eight years, he was transferred, at his own request, to the Chair of Historic, Casuistic, and Pastoral Theology, which position he continued to hold until 1880, when he was made Professor Emeritus by the Board of Directors. After his connexion with Columbia Seminary ceased, he continued to supply different churches in Baltimore and other cities and towns in Maryland, until his labors were terminated by death on the 22d of October, 1880.

Commemorative services were held in Baltimore before the removal of the remains to Richmond; and he was buried in

Hollywood Cemetery from the First Presbyterian church on Sunday afternoon, October 24th, 1880.

This condensed enumeration of dates and fields of labor, reminds us not only of the vicissitudes of Dr. Plumer's life, and the versatility which characterised him, but of the important positions and responsible trusts committed to him by the great Head of the Church.

In the brief space allowed to me, I propose, for the sake of more distinct impression, to condense what I have to say under separate heads, asking your permission to repeat some statements already given to the public, and which I cannot now reproduce in any better terms.

I. PERSONAL CHARACTERISTICS.

Dr. Plumer's majestic stature, his slow and measured step, his easy and graceful carriage, his dark eyes and heavy eyebrows of still darker shade, contrasting with his white hair falling back in heavy masses from his forehead, his snowy beard "waving on his breast like a flowing vestment," reminded the beholder of some majestic patriarch or ancient prophet—"a living sculpture of heroic mould."

Especially during the latter years of his life such was the impression made by his stately presence and venerable aspect, that on entering a crowded assembly or even in walking the streets of a great capital, he commanded immediate attention, and men accustomed to every variety of form and costume would turn to look at him as he passed, with a sentiment of involuntary homage.

To those not intimately acquainted with him, Dr. Plumer seemed to be indomitable, self-reliant, and regardless of the opinions of others. Just the contrary was true. He was cautious and singularly distrustful of his own judgment. This often led him to seek the counsel of those in whose prudence and discretion he had confidence. No man was more ready to defer to the opinions of those in whom he trusted, or to avail himself of their suggestions; but when he had found the light he conscientiously sought, and had deliberately matured his plans, no man was more decided or determined in their execution. Having once taken his position, no intimidation could induce him to swerve from it.

Planted upon what he believed to be truth and righteousness, he was firm as a rock. It was a fine discrimination which induced one of another denomination to say of him that "he united the simplicity of a child and the tenderness of a girl with the heroism of a martyr." He would make no compromise with error, but he was gentle to the erring. He did not shrink from controversy when orthodoxy had to be defended, but one of his favorite quotations was, "I would not give an hour of brotherly love for a whole eternity of contention." If he was bold and uncompromising as Luther on the platform, he was tender and sympathising as Melancthon in the social circle.

His unchanging loyalty to his friends, his generosity in giving to the poor, his simple and abstemious mode of living, his forgiving spirit and forgetfulness of injuries, his gratitude for kindness shown him, the unutterable tenderness of his manner towards the members of his own household, were conspicuous and characteristic traits which might be dwelt upon fondly, but to which now nothing but a passing allusion can be made.

II. PREACHER AND PASTOR.

Dr. Plumer's manner in the pulpit was peculiarly impressive. There was a dignity and even a majesty in his presence that commanded attention. His prayers were the tender pleadings of a soul in communion with God. There was a pathetic *tremolo* in his tone as he read the hymns for the day. He occasionally pre-faced the announcement of his text with some striking remark, arresting the attention of his entire audience. His voice was one of great flexibility and power. Its cadences varied with the sentiments which filled his mind and heart. When the thought was tender, the expression of it came in accents soft and low. The words fell like the dropping of tears. In the utterance of some sublime and stirring thought, his voice rang out like the sound of a trumpet. These transitions at times were abrupt and startling as a bugle call to battle. Nervous persons were occasionally agitated by them; his audiences generally were aroused and impressed by them. In the fulness of his strength in middle life he could have filled a great cathedral with the melodious thunder of his marvellous voice.

But these personal gifts did not constitute the chief source of his power. It was found in his intense realisation of the truth he uttered, in his deep conviction of the importance of the message which he proclaimed, and in his ardent love for the message itself. Such was his glory in the Cross, and such was his love for the gospel of salvation, that he could not help preaching it heartily in all its richness and tenderness and adaptation to the needs of men.

What he lacked in the logical development of his theme he compensated for by a peculiar force and clearness of *statement*, and by a wonderfully original power of illustration, drawn chiefly from the experiences and ordinary occurrences of life. He had a most happy faculty of turning passing events to spiritual account. As when at the White Sulphur Springs in the memorable summer of 1860, the band was continually called on to play the "*Marseillaise*," in the very height of the season of the excitement, as a correspondent tells us, he was appointed to preach. There was too much emotion of every kind, except the religious, in the ball-room where the service was held, for any ordinary man to gain the devout attention of the throng which crowded it; but at the appointed hour Dr. Plumer rose and towered above the extemporised pulpit which had been prepared for him, and in a voice whose deep bass rolled through the hall, suppressing all other sounds, he said, "Let us begin the worship of God by singing the *Marseillaise*-hymn of the Christian Church, 'All hail the power of Jesus' name.'" The audience "held its breath," as Dr. Plumer recited that grand coronation hymn, and nothing more was needed to command its hushed and reverential attention during the remainder of the service.

As a pastor he did what many pastors are afraid to do. He dealt personally and plainly with backsliders, rebuked and admonished the erring, without the slightest regard for the social position and influence of the offender. He bore the burdens of the poor, the lonely, and the afflicted of his flock on his heart. If he was a son of thunder on the platform and in the pulpit, he was a son of consolation in the sick room and among the bereaved of his people.

III. THEOLOGICAL PROFESSOR.

I am giving my impressions of Dr. Plumer from my personal remembrances of him, but in one department of his labor, and perhaps the greatest, I have no information derived from any observation or knowledge of my own, having never seen him in a Seminary class-room but once in my life, and then but a single hour. I must therefore be indebted to the experience of the honored pastor of the First Presbyterian church of Richmond, and others who were his pupils at Alleghany and Columbia, who have already borne their faithful and loving testimony to his efficiency as a teacher, his self-sacrificing devotion to the two institutions in which he held office, and his unremitting efforts to provide for the temporal and spiritual welfare of the pupils intrusted to his care, and who were attracted to these schools by his great reputation as a Theological Professor.

IV. DILIGENCE AND INDUSTRY.

While Dr. Plumer was endowed by his Creator with extraordinary intellectual powers, he never presumed upon them, but worked with as much zeal and perseverance as if he believed he was to be indebted for all his success in life to indefatigable labor unaided by natural gifts. It always pained me to see him write. It was the slow, weary scratching of a cramped infelicitous hand.

And yet he wrote a Commentary on the Psalms of more than 1,200 printed pages, a Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans, another on the Epistle to the Hebrews, many practical works calculated to establish the faith of believers or to awaken the impenitent, which have been recognised as a part of the permanent literature of the Church, besides innumerable tracts for the Presbyterian Board of Publication, for the Methodist Book Concern of Nashville and of New York, for the Board of Publication of the Reformed Dutch Church, for the Baptist Publication Society of Philadelphia, for the American Sunday School Union, and for the Presbyterian Publication Committee of Richmond.

Some of these works were republished in Europe, others were translated into German, French, Chinese, and modern Greek. While Professor in the Western Theological Seminary he was

also the successful pastor of the Central Presbyterian church of Alleghany. While Professor in Columbia, the church to which he ministered steadily grew in numbers and was blessed with precious revivals. While pastor in the city of Richmond he edited *The Watchman of the South*. During the whole of his public life he received and accepted invitations to deliver lectures and addresses before Lyceums, Benevolent Institutions, Young Men's Christian Associations, Male and Female Schools, and the Literary Societies of Colleges and Universities at their Commencements.

For more than forty years he was contributor to the periodical press, writing for reviews, for magazines, for many of the religious newspapers North and South, besides conducting a private correspondence which to most men would have been burdensome in the extreme. Perhaps no man of his time, not in political life, knew more people, or wrote a larger number of letters on subjects so varied and important.

V. HONORS.

To such a man earthly distinctions are comparatively insignificant things. He was once offered a very distinguished political position, but his reply to the invitation was, that he already held an office greater than that which any secular power could confer on him.

He was twice made Moderator of the General Assembly—first of the General Assembly of 1838, and then of the Southern Assembly which sat in Huntsville, Ala., in 1871.

The Presidency of several Colleges and the Secretaryship of several of the Boards of the Church were at different times offered him, but he never saw his way clear to accept any of these appointments. In 1838, Washington College, Pennsylvania, Lafayette College, Pennsylvania, and Princeton College conferred upon him the title of Doctor of Divinity, and in 1857 the University of Mississippi conferred upon him the degree of Doctor of Laws. In 1877, Dr. Plumer was a delegate to the Council of all the Presbyterian Churches of the world, which met in the city of Edinburgh. There he commanded the most marked attention, and left an impression upon the thousands who saw and heard him, which will not be forgotten in this generation.

VI. OLD AGE.

Dr. Plumer retained much of the freshness of early feeling to the last, because he never lost his interest in the present. His heart was ever warm by reason of his fondness for the society of the young. He entered with a quick and ready sympathy into all that interested them. Their vivacity, hopefulness, and mirthfulness were to him as a fountain from which he refreshed his own spirit. Unlike many men of advanced years, he did not indulge in laudation of times gone by, as if in the generations of the past the skies were brighter than now, and the flowers of the garden and the heart sweeter than those which bloom in our own day. While he adhered with an ever-increasing loyalty to the principles and the systems whose value had been tested by time and experience, he was ever ready to welcome new ideas, new enterprises, and methods of working. To the very last he was looking for fresh fields of labor, and laying plans for continued usefulness. The longer he lived, the more to him did life seem worth living. Thus did he illustrate the beautiful portraiture of the Psalmist, "Those that be planted in the house of the Lord shall flourish in the courts of our God. They shall still bring forth fruit in old age"—fruit fair to the sight and pleasant to the taste.

We cannot say of such a man that he is gone. He lives in his descendants, whom he might have addressed, in the parting hour, in the words of the old patriarch: "Behold, I die, but God shall be with you." He lives in the truths he preached and in the examples of his long and laborious life. He lives in the writings which have fortified the faith and comforted the sorrows of countless readers. He lives in the labors of more than five hundred young ministers who were his pupils in the Theological Seminaries in which he taught, and who are now scattered all over the world—some of them in these States, some among the Indian tribes of the West, in Brazil, Siam, Japan, India, and China. He lives in the souls of those converted by these varied instrumentalities. "They that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament, and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars for ever and ever."