

PORTRAITURES OF FOUR PASTORS.

AN anniversary like this awakens many commingled emotions; tender and grateful memories of the past; devout thankfulness for the blessings of the present; animating hopes of coming good in the future.

In many respects Richmond has been a highly favored city. Beautiful for situation; for more than a century the social as well as the political capital of the commonwealth; from its earliest history the home of men whose distinction in the learned professions, or whose reputation as jurists, patriots and sages, has given lustre to the State and to the republic; it has gained for itself a prominence not accorded to many cities of our land far surpassing it in wealth and population. It has also been the home of a long line of eminent ministers of the gospel, whose piety and usefulness conferred dignity to their calling while they lived, and now that they have been removed to a higher sphere of service, we who survive cherish their memories with undying affection and perpetuate the story of their toils and triumphs for the study, the imitation and the inspiration of the generations to come.

It is my office to-night to speak only of those who, having fought the good fight and finished their course, have taken their places in the ranks of the crowned and glorified. Other anniversaries of this church will be celebrated hereafter. Other speakers will recount the completed history of those who now live, and thus the legacy of precious memories will

be transmitted to posterity as an ever increasing inheritance to enrich the church of future times.

It was a memorable event in this city, when, eighty years ago, this church having been organized in the summer of 1812, Dr. John Holt Rice was called and installed as its first pastor in the following autumn. A more fortunate selection could not have been made, but before I speak of the great work he accomplished here, I wish to dwell for a moment on the providential and gracious training he received in preparation for his successful pastorate of twelve years in this city.

The story of his early life is deeply interesting, because it illustrates the way by which he was led by successive stages to the eminence he afterwards attained.

The child of pious parents, his birthplace was in Bedford county, distinguished among all the counties of the State for the number of eminent men it has produced. His first teachers were men of learning, piety and long experience as instructors of youth. Notable among these was the Rev. Dr. William Graham, of Liberty Hall Academy, under whose training a youth of such tender susceptibility could not fail to receive impressions the most durable and salutary. Early consecrating himself as he did to a vocation which ultimately was to bring him before the great assemblies which he addressed in ecclesiastical courts or from the pulpits of the chief cities of the Union, it was no small advantage that in his early youth he had the opportunity of hearing the most distinguished orators in that portion of it which even Dr. Channing declared was the home of the noblest eloquence. He had heard Marshall, and Madison, and Henry, and Randolph. On one occasion his father introduced him to Henry on the court-green, saying, "Here is my young son, Mr. Henry, who is about to set out in a few days to try his fortune in the world," when the great orator, as Dr.

Maxwell tells us, took him by the hand, in his frank and hearty way, and said, "Be of good courage, and remember that the best men always make themselves"—a saying that made a deep impression on his mind, and often recurred to his memory to rally his resolution and to stimulate him to high endeavors. On another memorable occasion he was in a great throng gathered at Charlotte Courthouse, where Mr. Henry made one of his last addresses, and Randolph one of his first. If Henry was the setting sun in its full orb and mellow splendor, Randolph was the brilliant and eccentric star of the morning, just rising above the horizon.

Trained in such a school of noble oratory, we find some of the formative and moulding influences which caused Dr. James W. Alexander, in his portraiture of him after he had attained the development of mature life, to say, "If he had any superior in the mastery of sound, free, vigorous English, it is not within my knowledge." In common with such preachers as Fenelon, Whitefield, John Mason and Robert Hall, he never allowed himself to be enslaved by what he had written in his study. His ablest sermons were, as to form, the productions of the hour.

Different men have different methods and times of study. Dr. Rice, diligent by day, reserved his severer and more protracted studies for the night, often toiling until one or two o'clock in the morning. The result of these labors was that he became one of the most scholarly men of his day. He was equally remarkable for the thoroughness of his investigations and for the wide range of his attainments. Not only was he a profound theologian and a successful student of the exact sciences, but he revelled in the study of the ancient classics, and he was equally familiar with the most elegant literature of modern times. These attainments were all reverently laid at the feet of the Master, and the flower and crown of his life was the hearty and

unreserved consecration of himself to God, with every affection of his heart filled with the constraining love of Christ. Such was the man who was the founder of this church, whose eightieth anniversary you celebrate to-night with a gratitude and a joy for which words give inadequate expression.

The time when Dr. Rice came to Richmond was auspicious. The way had already been partially prepared by the labors of visiting ministers from other parts of the State, who came to render occasional service, but more especially by the amiable and lovely John D. Blair, who preached for many years in the hall of the old capitol, alternating with Dr. Buchanan, thus presenting the spectacle of one congregation ministered to on one Sunday by a Presbyterian and on the next by an Episcopal divine, each conducting the service according to the forms preferred by himself, the people uniting in both and showing no preference for either. This happy unity was made more close and tender by the warm friendship existing between the two men, who lived and labored together and died within a few days of each other, and then went up to renew their intercourse in the world of love: a prophecy and a prelude to the harmony which has descended to our own day, a harmony which has always been a delightful characteristic of the relations between the churches of all denominations in this city.

There was also another providential preparation for his coming of the most impressive character. This was the burning of the Richmond Theatre on the night of the 26th of December, 1811. The play performed on that occasion was entitled "The Bleeding Nun," quickly followed by a tragedy of bleeding hearts and bereavements the most deplorable, when on that fatal night so many of the gifted, the beautiful and the brave lamentably perished, spreading sorrow over the city and throughout the State.

This tragical event was solemnly commemorated in many

of the churches in Virginia, and was the occasion of a wonderful quickening in the spiritual life of the few scattered Presbyterians in the city, awakening a deep conviction of the necessity of an organized church under the care of a pastor who could devote himself to the development of all that makes such an organization strong by its corporate unity and wisely directed zeal and systematic efforts towards the extension of Christ's kingdom.

It was under influences like these that Dr. Rice accepted the call and commenced his ministry in an humble edifice in the lower part of the city, and then, after struggles and oppositions needless now to rehearse, he succeeded in having a church built "higher up town," as the people then expressed it, between Seventeenth and Eighteenth streets, called the Pineapple Church, because of some inappropriate device on the steeple. Dr. Rice often preached in the Mason's hall, a large wooden building on lower Franklin street, but no matter where his sermons were delivered, crowds flocked to his ministry, and on some occasions hundreds went away without being able to obtain even standing room in the building. During his pastorate two hundred and sixty-five members were added to the church, under disadvantages and discouragements of which we now happily have only the traditions.

He might have spent the whole of his noble life in Richmond but for the irresistible call he received to Prince Edward to succeed Dr. Moses Hoge, who, while president of Hampden-Sidney College, was elected by the Synod of Virginia as its first professor of theology for the education of candidates for the gospel ministry.

I hope all intelligent Presbyterians know something of Dr. Rice's trials and triumphs in the organization of that school of the prophets. It was there that by far the most valuable work of his life was accomplished. It was there

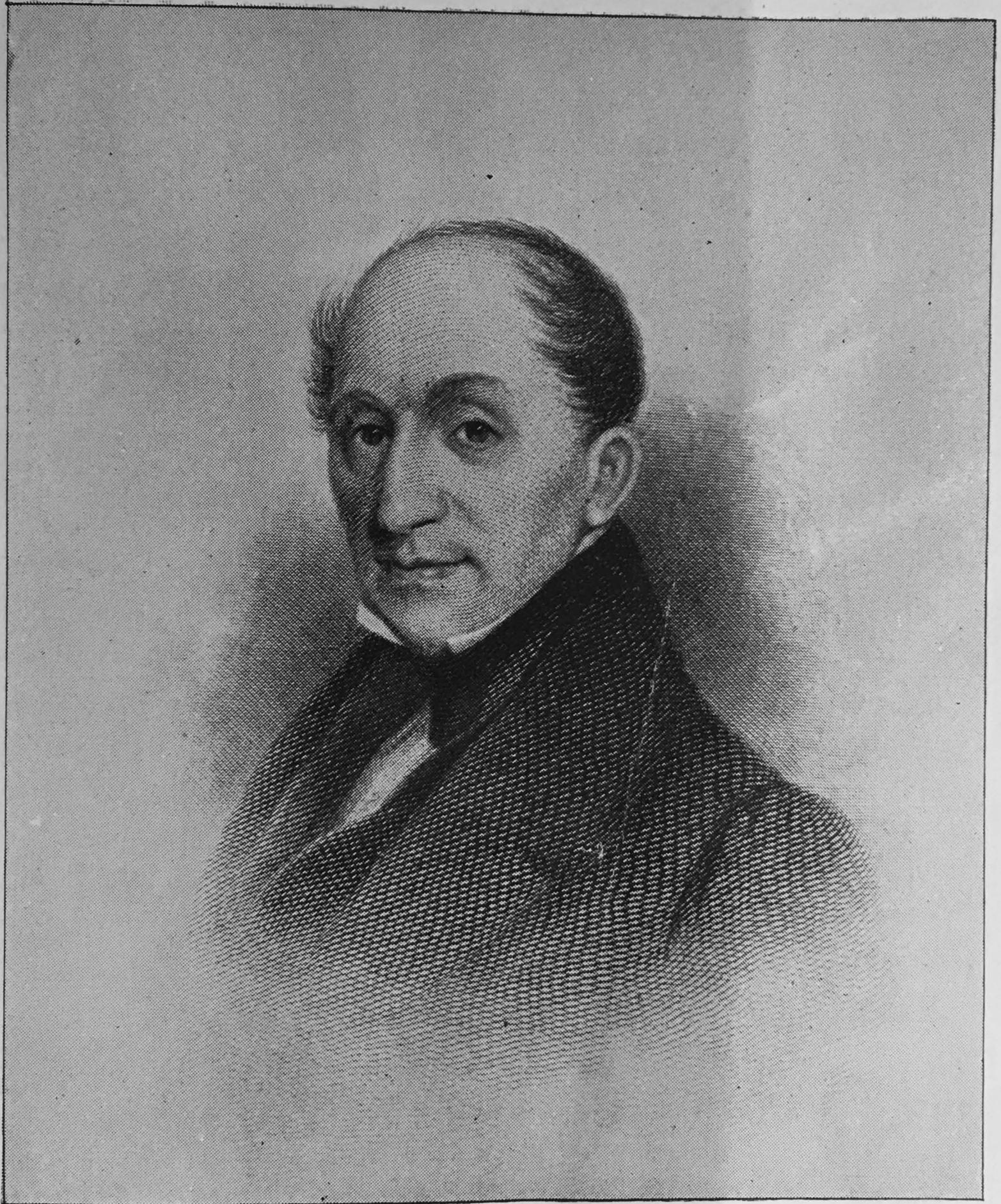
that he died. I have often heard his widow, Mrs. Rice, with whom I lived while a college student, describe his closing hours. Just as he was passing away he said, "Mercy is—" The word which followed was indistinct. Said one, "He tells us that mercy is great." "No," said Mrs. Rice, "It was a longer word than that."

The dying man rallied all his remaining strength and said, "MERCY IS TRIUMPHANT."

The next pastor of this church was one who was suggested and recommended by Dr. Rice himself at the time of his resignation—Dr. William Jessup Armstrong—the man of genial, loving spirit, and sweet apostolic piety

He was a native of New Jersey and the son of a Presbyterian minister. When about to leave home to become a student at Princeton College, his father yearning for his salvation and, if it might please God, for his becoming a preacher of the gospel, prepared a sermon for the youth of his congregation, having, of course, his son in his mind and in his heart during its composition and delivery. That sermon was the means of arresting his attention to the transcendent importance of an interest in the great salvation. In a few months afterwards he made a profession of his faith, placed himself under the care of the Presbytery as a candidate for the ministry, and after completing his theological studies at Princeton, obtained his license to preach. His first charge was in Albemarle County, Virginia, in the vicinity of the University, where he labored successfully for two years. His second was in Trenton, New Jersey, and during his residence there he was called to succeed Dr. Rice, and was installed in October, 1824, as pastor of this church.

His faithful labors were so signally blessed that in 1829 it became necessary to erect a new and larger church edifice, which, to keep pace with the tide of population in its flow towards the west, was located on the north side of Franklin



REV. WILLIAM J. ARMSTRONG, D. D.

SECOND PASTOR

street, between Thirteenth and Fourteenth streets. Those of you who remember that edifice no doubt can reconstruct it in imagination, with its imposing front, its commodious audience chamber, its wide galleries, and its entire adaptation to the purposes for which it was designed; well lighted, well ventilated, with no intercepting pillars to obstruct the sight, and no echoing arches to distract the sound. It was a noble edifice, easy to the speaker, pleasant to the hearer, and in all respects comfortable to the large congregations that for so many years crowded its walls.

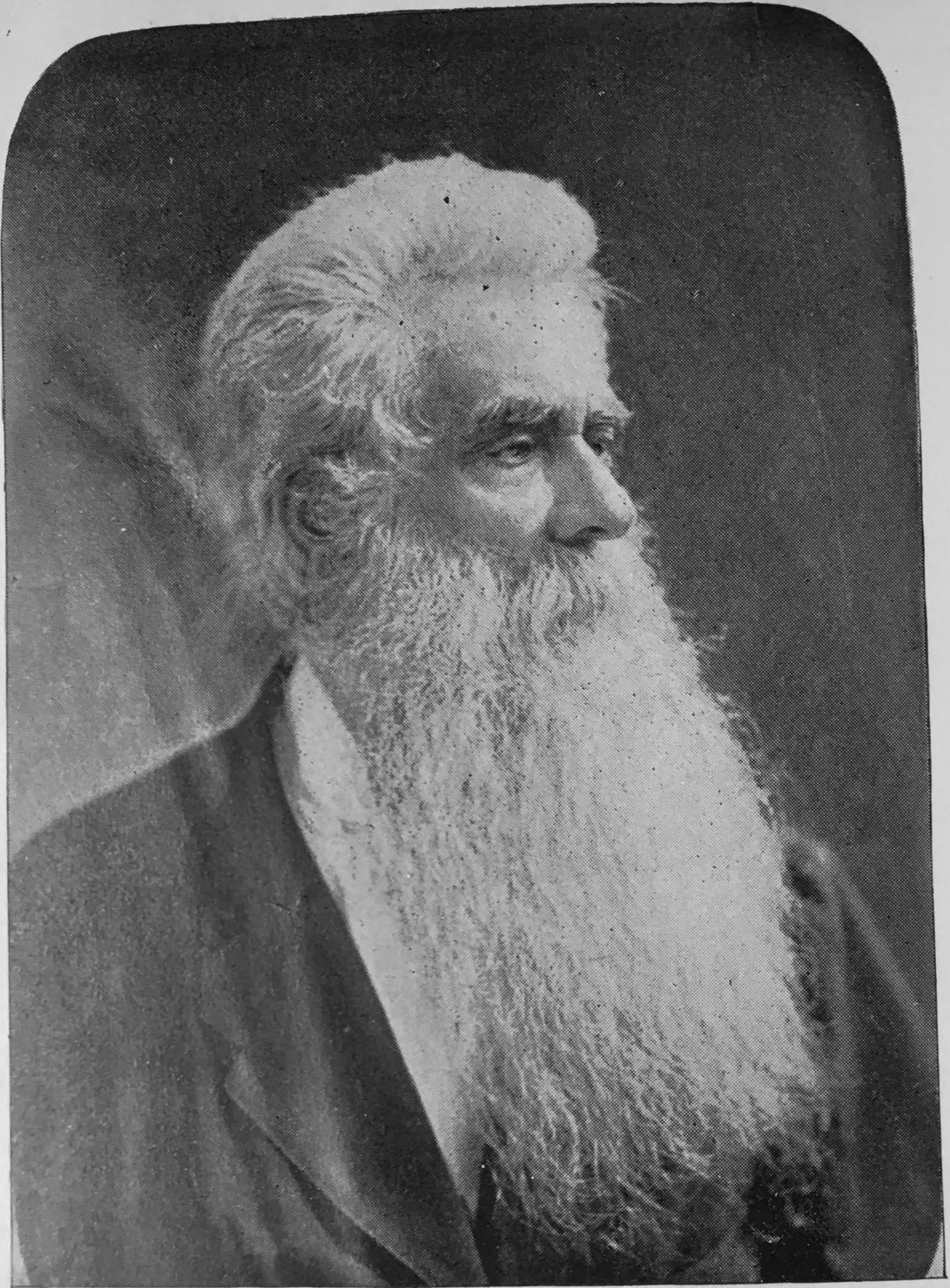
Here Dr. Armstrong prosecuted his work with ever-increasing diligence and delight for ten years. His character as a preacher and pastor constitutes his noblest eulogy. His manner in the pulpit was profoundly reverential. He never trifled with his hearers, never sought to amuse them with facetious remarks or illustrations. He was too much in earnest, he felt the solemnity and urgency of his message too much for that. He never tried to attract hearers by the announcement of sensational topics or by the fascinations of a meretricious rhetoric. With a heart full of heavenly affections, he relied on the attractions of the cross as the divinely ordained instrumentality for drawing men and holding them under the influence of the truth. If at times his tenderness found expression in tears, those tears were the melting of his own heart, a heart melted by the love of Jesus. Such a life, such a ministry, could not be without its fruits. Three revivals of religion crowned his labors of love. It was his joy and reward to receive seventy persons into the church on one Sabbath.

I must not omit to mention also the interest he took in all the great enterprises of Christian benevolence, and especially in behalf of the cause of missions. On one occasion while addressing a congregation, in which there were several ministers, he exclaimed, "Brethren, I am ashamed that there

are so many of us in this land. Some of us must go to the heathen." It was this devotion to the work of foreign missions which led to his appointment as General Agent of the American Board of Commissioners of Foreign Missions, and subsequently to his election as secretary of that board; and his church in this city, recognizing the paramount claim of that work, generously, though in grief at the separation, gave up the pastor so endeared to them, because of their greater love to the Master, who had called him to a more important field of service.

The history of the event that abruptly terminated that last work of his life is full of tragic and tender interest. He had gone from the City of New York to Boston to meet a Missionary Committee, and on the day of his return a storm set in with great violence. His friends begged him not to venture on the Sound in such a tempest, but thinking the disturbance might be a local one, he did not fear to entrust himself to the staunch steamer in which he was to make the voyage. But the gale was fiercer on the water than on the land, and after the extinguishing of the fire, the dragging of the anchors and the hopeless drifting of the vessel towards the breakers, it became evident that the wreck was inevitable. The passengers gathered around the man of God, whose steadfast heart knew no fear and whose calmness did not for a moment forsake him. This was the closing scene in his ministry when he exhorted those who seemed to cling to him for safety to make God their refuge, and when, after words of consolation and prayer for his companions in danger, he declared his perfect confidence in the wisdom and goodness of Him "who doeth all things well."

When the lifeless body was found on the shore, good men reverentially took it up and prepared it for the burial, which took place midst the lamentations of the multitude who witnessed the funeral obsequies.



REV. WILLIAM S. PLUMER, D. D.,

THIRD PASTOR.

When the pulpit of the church became vacant by the transference of Dr. Armstrong to the Board of Foreign Missions, it became necessary, at once, if possible, to supply his place. The church did not have to look long or go far. Dr. Plumer was at that time the pastor of the Tabb Street church in Petersburg. He accepted the call which was tendered him, and was installed in October, 1834. He commenced his work auspiciously, but the troublous times of 1837 were approaching. The controversies which agitated the church resulted in division. As one of your manuals well expresses it, "consequent upon that division the church suffered severely in the loss of many of its most valued and highly esteemed members." "In four years, however," the manual goes on to say, "the loss was more than made up, and in three years thereafter it was found advisable to colonize. A colony of seventy-four members was dismissed from this church, and in February 1845, was organized by East Hanover Presbytery as a Second Presbyterian church of Richmond." The church thus organized has, in its turn, sent forth two colonies; but the parent church, now a venerable grandmother, eighty years of age, shows no signs of decrepitude, but daily renews her youth, and bids fair to become the ancestress of a numerous progeny.

Probably no man in our time was more widely known in these United States than Dr. Plumer. His reputation as a preacher secured for him great audiences wherever he went. Those who did not care for the ordinances of God's house, and who rarely attended any place of worship, would flock to any church where it was known that he would officiate. He touched society at so many points and had so many ways of impressing himself on the public that his reputation extended far and wide. As an editor; as a contributor to the periodical press; writing for reviews, for magazines, for the publication boards of all denominations; as the author of

commentaries on the Scriptures, and many religious books, some of which were republished in Europe, and others translated into German, French and Modern Greek; as a professor in two theological seminaries, which have sent forth hundreds of ministers, with his impress upon them, to labor in every part of the world; as a lecturer before literary institutions and benevolent associations; as a correspondent, writing innumerable letters, especially to those whom he knew to be afflicted and bereaved, letters full of sympathy and consolation; in all these and many other ways, he gained the eye, the ear and heart of the great public, by availing himself of every channel of communication and every avenue of usefulness.

His ready skill in seizing upon passing events and turning them to profitable account, was another of his happy gifts. Many illustrations of this might be given. Let one suffice. The summer of 1860, at the White Sulphur Springs, was a time of intense excitement among the guests assembled there because of the anticipated secession of the Southern States. In the parlor, on the piazza, at the table, beneath the shade of the trees on the lawn, this was the all-absorbing theme, and nothing else could hold the attention. The band played patriotic airs and the Marseillaise was the most popular of all and most frequently in demand. One Sunday in the very height of the season, when political fervor was most intense, Dr. Plumer was appointed to preach. The crowd gathered as usual, but how was any man to master its attention? Promptly at 11 o'clock the commanding form of Dr. Plumer arose from the platform extemporized for a pulpit, and in the deepest bass of his wondrous voice announced, "Now let us begin the worship of God by singing the Marseillaise hymn of christianity," "All hail the power of Jesus' name." The effect was immediate. All confusion was stilled as by a mighty influence, as Dr. Plumer

recited the whole of that grand coronation hymn. Nothing more was needed to command the most reverential attention to the very end of the service.

It was often said that the pulpit was his throne and there the successes he most valued were achieved. His power in the pulpit was due in part to natural gifts; a commanding person reminding the beholder of some majestic patriarch or prophet, a voice of great flexibility and power, often tremulous and low when he began to speak, but increasing in volume as his heart kindled with his theme, until it sounded like melodious thunder and reached the most distant limits of the great audiences he addressed.

But that was not the chief source of his power. It was because of his intense realization of the truths he uttered, his deep conviction of the importance of the message he brought, his ardent love for the message itself, and because of his own experience of the preciousness of the Saviour whose grace and glory he proclaimed. This was the secret of his ability to rivet the attention, to move and melt the hearts of those whom he besought as an ambassador of Christ.

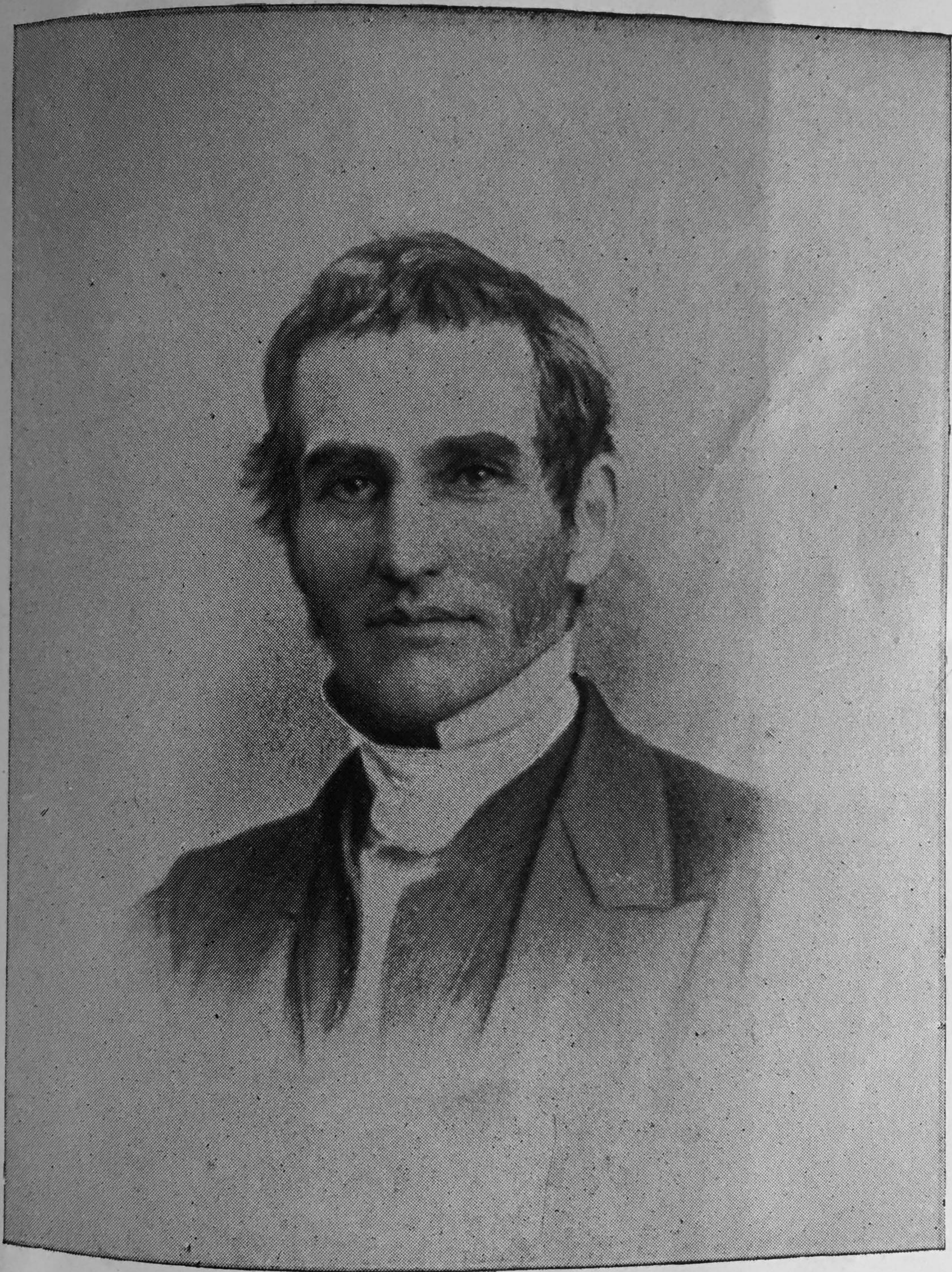
Many affecting scenes were witnessed in the church building of which this is the reproduction—the edifice which stood on the ground where the City Hall now rears its imposing front,—but none fuller of solemn and tender impressiveness than when the funeral obsequies of Dr. Plumer were celebrated within its walls. None who were present will ever forget the scene; the vast assembly so hushed and still; the tributes of love and sorrow from ministers of different denominations; the tears that so freely flowed as the people listened to the recital of their old pastor's services, laborious life and triumphant death. It was the eloquent testimony of God's people that a prince and a great man had fallen in Israel.

The pastoral relation between Dr. Plumer and the church

was dissolved in November 1846, on his accepting a call to the Franklin Street Church in Baltimore. A whole year elapsed before his successor was installed. That successor was one whose name—Thomas Verner Moore—is like fragrance from a garden of sweet spices. It was his distinction to possess an unusual variety of gifts, all so harmonized as to produce a character of rare and beautiful symmetry. These gifts were refined and developed by careful culture, and then hallowed by the consecration of them all to Him who had so richly endowed him. There was a charm even in his natural endowments. With a face full of manly beauty, with a voice singularly penetrating, yet soft and exquisitely modulated, with manners gentle and winning, with social qualities that made his society delightful to his friends, with a delicate humor that enlivened his conversation, he was always welcome in every circle; a genial host to those whom he entertained under his hospitable roof, and a favorite guest under the roof of those whose good fortune it was to entertain him.

As a writer he is probably best known by the little work entitled "The Last Days of Jesus," or by his history of "The Culdee Church," though his most thoughtful and learned work was his "Commentary on the Minor Prophets," a work favorably noticed by leading reviews, both in this country and in Great Britain. His refutation of Morell's "Theory of Inspiration," published in the course of lectures delivered at the University of Virginia, was so thorough that even the *Westminster Review* for once ceased to cavil and gave it a hearty approval.

As a presbyter, his clear, discriminating judgment, together with his acquaintance with forms and precedents and ecclesiastical law, made him one of the most useful members of our ecclesiastical courts. His dignity and courtesy were also recognized in every judicatory in which



REV. THOMAS V. MOORE, D. D.,
FOURTH PASTOR.

he sat. During the twenty years of his connection with the Synod of Virginia, though he took decided positions on the questions in the discussion of which he participated, though he was firm in his convictions and fearless in maintaining them, he never made a remark which wounded the feelings of another; and I am happy to add, there was never a member of those church courts rude enough to wound *his* feelings by an unkind word.

As a preacher, his sermons were pervaded by an unction which belongs only to those who live in communion with Christ, and who have tasted the sweetness of his love. He had in an eminent degree the talent which distinguished Melville, of the Church of England,—that of presenting a thought in so many and in such attractive lights, that even inconsiderate hearers had their attention arrested. There was an urgency mingled with tender persuasiveness in his manner, such as became an ambassador of God, and his appeals went to the heart with a power that was attested by the large numbers added to the church during all the years of his ministry.

The Presbyterian Church in Virginia still feels the loss of a man so gifted, so versatile, so successful. As a scholar he is missed, for a scholar is a rare product, and one of slow growth. We miss the pastor, the presbyter, the ready writer, the genial friend, the christian gentleman.

When seated in the car of the train which bore him from Richmond, on his journey to Nashville to take charge of the church whose call he had accepted, after taking tender leave of the friends who had accompanied him to the station, as the train glided by the lingering group, he leaned from the window, and raising his arm, with extended finger, he pointed upward. This was his mute, expressive farewell. That gesture was an illustration of what he himself had been, and what he had done by his sermons and by his life—pointing to heaven and leading the way.

I have now finished my portraiture of the four deceased pastors. How different each was from the other; each with an individuality most marked; unlike in temperament, manners, style, natural endowments, and acquired attainments, yet all alike in love to one common Saviour, in devotion to the church which Christ loved, and which they loved for Christ's sake. All were eminently useful, each in his own way; all, as we confidently believe, now enjoying their rest and recompense in heaven, having passed through the beautiful gate of the temple into the place where those who served God on earth still serve him in a higher sphere, beholding his face in righteousness, satisfied with his likeness.