William Miller Paxton (24 pages)
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III.

WILLIAM MILLER PAXTON.*

WE are here to-day gratefully to remember before God the life of one of His saints. Up to a good old age he abode among us, imitating his Master's example, going about doing good. Our eyes see him no more: he no longer passes in and out, showing us daily what it is to walk with God. But our hearts are glad for him yet: and we wish to give expression to our gratitude to God for his gift, and to recount the chief services he has been permitted to render to the Church of God on earth.

William Miller Paxton was descended from a godly ancestry of thoroughly Presbyterian traditions. As the name indicates, the family was of Berwickshire origin. In the branch of it from which Dr. Paxton sprang it was Scotch-Irish. The earliest of his paternal ancestors who has been certainly traced—the fourth in ascent from him—is found a little before the middle of the eighteenth century living in Bart township, Lancaster county, Pennsylvania, in a Scotch-Irish community which worshiped at Middle Octorara Church. The only son of this founder of the family served as an elder in that church; and out of it came his son, Dr. Paxton's grandfather, the Rev. Dr. William Paxton, who, after having like his father before him fought in the Revolutionary war for the liberties of his country, enlisted as a soldier of Christ in the never-ceasing conflict for righteousness. Crossing the Susquehanna, he was settled in 1792 as pastor of Lower Marsh Creek Church, in what is now Adams county, Pennsylvania, and there fulfilled a notable ministry of half a century's duration. Thus a new home was given to the family in a region of remarkable beauty and in a community of similar origin and congenial temperament.

Dr. Paxton always cherished a wholesome pride in his ancestral home and his lineage. When he reckoned among the felicities of Dr. Francis Herron's career that he was born "beneath the shadow of Pennsylvania's lofty mountains, and reared amid the patriots

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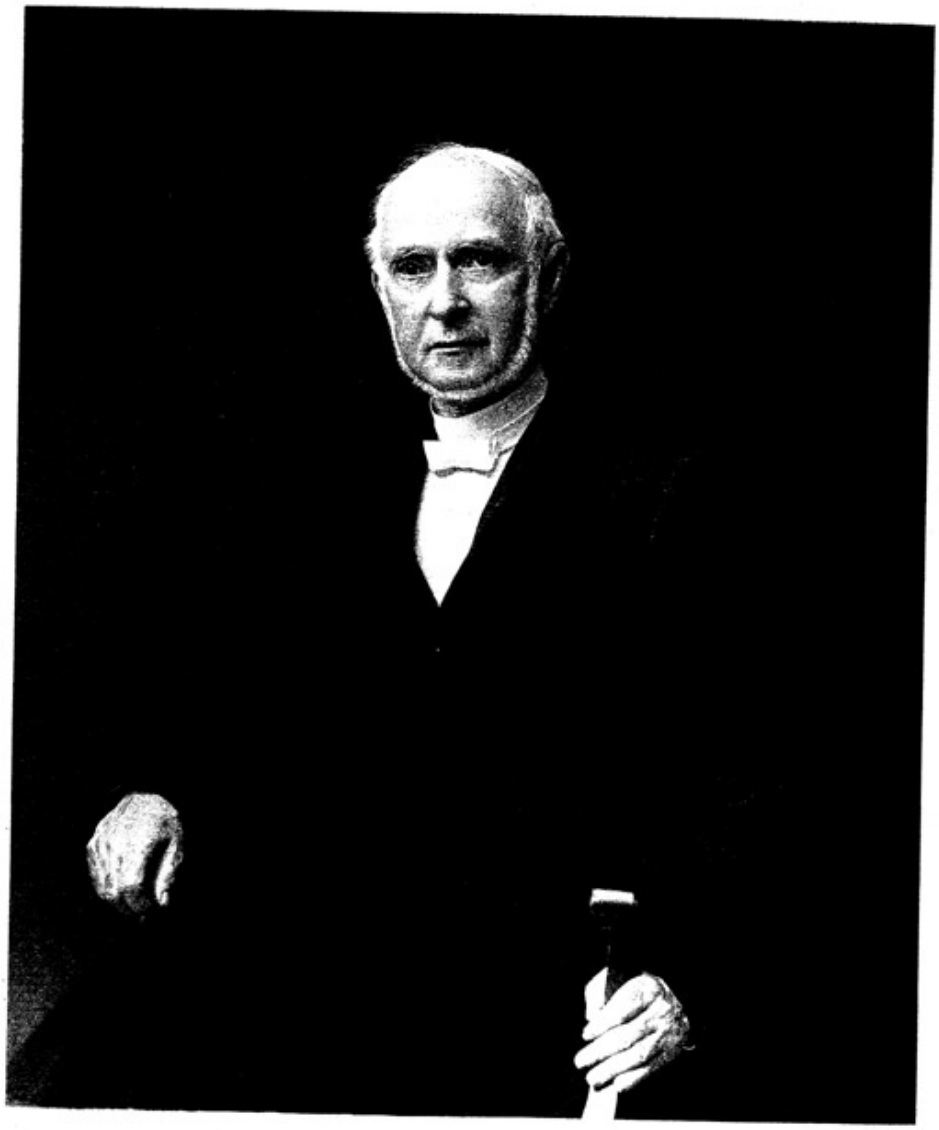

of the Revolution"; and that he was a scion "of that illustrious historic race, the Scotch-Irish Presbyterians—memorable in all their generations for their devotion to liberty and religion, and ever ready to die upon the battlefield in the defense of the one or to burn at the stake as a testimony for the other"—he spoke out of his own consciousness of a noble heritage. And it was a source of constant delight to him that, having himself begun to study theology within three months of the death of his grandfather, their combined ministries fulfilled an almost continuous service in the Gospel of more than one hundred years. Nor was this continuity merely a matter of years. When we read the account of the Rev. Dr. William Paxton which his friend, Dr. McConaughy, has left us, we seem almost to be reading of our own Dr. Paxton. The "benignant and intelligent countenance," the "strong, vigorous and balanced intellect," the "symmetrically developed faculties," "the warmth of affection," "delicate sensibility," "chaste imagination," which Dr. McConaughy signalizes as characteristic of his Dr. Paxton—his care and exactness in the mental preparation of his sermons, the naturalness and lucidity of their arrangement, the thoroughness of their discussion, the freedom, solemnity, dignity, authority, grace of their delivery: have we not seen all these things repeated in our Dr. Paxton? We are told that Dr. Paxton was particularly fond of his grandfather and loved to visit him and be much with him. We all remember the affectionate reverence with which he always referred to him. We can scarcely be wrong in supposing that, in addition to his natural inheritance from him, he consciously modeled himself upon his example.

Dr. Paxton's father, Colonel James Dunlop Paxton, was a man of intelligence and enterprise, of fine presence and large influence in the community, engaged in the manufacture of iron, first at Maria Furnace, which was situated at the foot of South Mountain, some ten or twelve miles from Gettysburg, and afterward, in partnership with the Hon. Thaddeus Stevens, at Caledonia Iron Works, on the pike ketween Gettysburg and Chambersburg. It was at Maria Furnace that William Miller Paxton was born, on the 7th day of June, 1824. His youth was passed chiefly at Gettysburg, whither the family had removed that Mrs. Paxton, a daughter of the Hon. William Miller, might be among her people during a long and trying period of weak health. Here he spent a sunny and gay-tempered boyhood, winning affection on all sides by the brightness of his disposition and his happy, fun-loving humor. Here also he received both his primary schooling and his collegiate training, the latter

at Pennsylvania College—recently founded, it is true, but already occupying an enviable position among colleges under the efficient presidency of the Rev. Dr. Charles Philip Krauth. In college he enjoyed the fellowship of a choice company of young men who, like himself, were to give a good account of themselves in the future as ministers of Christ—Lutherans like B. M. Schmucker and J. P. Benjamin Sadtler, President of Muhlenberg College; Episcopalians like Robert Harper Clarkson, Bishop of Nebraska; Presbyterians like G. W. McMillan, missionary to India, and J. B. Bittinger, teacher and preacher. Among his fellow-students were also at least two who were to serve the Church efficiently as professors of theology, Henry Ziegler, of Selinsgrove, and James A. Brown, who taught theology for nearly twenty years at Gettysburg. Graduated in 1843, he carried away from college a reputation for rare social qualities and great gifts in oratory.

Residing now at Caledonia Iron Works, he began the study of law in the office of Judge George Chambers at Chambersburg. He had not yet given himself to Christ. During his last year in college the institution was visited by a most blessed revival; and during his period of law study the community was moved to its centre by another, in which his chief, Judge Chambers, for example, was converted. He seems to have passed through both without reaching a decision. How the great change came to him at last we do not know in any detail. We only know that the grace of God was in part mediated to him through the offices of his devout sister, and that after prosecuting the study of law for almost two years, he united on profession of faith with the Falling Spring Presbyterian Church at Chambersburg, in March, 1845. Dr. Daniel McKinley was pastor of the church; and we hear from Dr. Paxton's associates of those days much about his affectionate intimacy with his pastor. Not more than a month after uniting with the Church, on April 9, 1845, he was received under the care of the Presbytery of Carlisle as a candidate for the Gospel ministry, and in the ensuing autumn he repaired to Princeton for his theological training. It would appear from this that when he gave himself to his Lord he gave himself completely, holding nothing back.

We are not unprepared, therefore, to learn that he took his seminary course seriously; and sought to utilize to the full the opportunities it brought him to prepare for the great work to which he had devoted himself. Although so young a Christian, he appears to have stood out among his comrades from the first for the depth and fervor of his religious life. Those were, indeed, days of search-

ing of heart for him. "I well remember," he has told us himself, "that when I was a student, no young man could pass through his first year without being constrained to reëxamine his personal hope and motives for seeking the sacred office." No doubt this is primarily an encomium upon the pungency of the religious teaching of those four great men under whose instruction he sat—Drs. Archibald Alexander and Samuel Miller, Drs. Charles Hodge and Addison Alexander. But it is a leaf, also, out of his spiritual autobiography. His fellow-students bear consentient witness to the singleness of his purpose, the seriousness of his character, the dignity of his bearing, and the attractiveness of his personality. "He was a hard student," writes one, "industrious and painstaking; as a man, solid and judicious, and hence wielding much influence over men." Another touches the heart of the matter when he remarks that he had obviously said to himself, "This one thing I do." "He did not fritter away his time," continues this informant; "he made theology, the grandest of the sciences, his study, and how to deliver the Gospel message most effectively." "The memory of what Paxton was," he adds, "and of his devotion to theology and to his Lord and Master, has remained with me, and has been a distinct and decided help to me in my weakness and in my times of doubt and difficulty."

One of the things Dr. Paxton always congratulated himself upon was that he had had a double training in theology. "The class to which I belonged," he tells us, "heard" Dr. Archibald Alexander's "lectures upon Didactic Theology as well as those of Dr. Hodge. Dr. Hodge gave us a subject with massive learning, in its logical development, in its beautiful balance and connection with the whole system. Dr. Alexander would take the same subject and smite it with a javelin, and let the light through it. His aim was to make one point and nail it fast. I always came from a lecture with these words ringing through my mind, 'A nail driven in a sure place.'" But his devotion to the study of theology was more than matched by his zeal in cultivating the art of presenting its truths in strong, clear and winning public address. A doctrinal preacher he wished to be, because he felt to the core of his being that it is useless to preach at all unless you preach the truth. But the real end of his study of doctrine was that he might become a doctrinal preacher. He had no sympathy with that kind of doctrinal preacher which he called, not without a touch of contempt, "a theological grinder"; and whose procedure he described as "crushing and pulverizing truth between logical millstones, and then doling it out, grain by grain, particle by particle, as if the bread

of heaven was scarce, and the minister restricted to a slow and frugal distribution." He longed to become himself a preacher who could preach doctrine—as he put it—"all ablaze," who could "put the light of his own living experience inside" the doctrine, and "make it a spiritual transparency" which would "interest and attract." "A heart that is full of Christ," he said, "will gild every doctrine with the halo of His glory."

With this ideal held steadily before him, he spared no labor in perfecting himself in the art of orally presenting truth. Already in college, we will remember, he had exhibited marked oratorical gifts: and during the interval between college and seminary he had exercised these gifts in political speaking. Now, however, he set himself definitively to develop them to their utmost capacity. His sister remembered all her life his diligence on his visits home in the training of his voice: there was a jutting rock on the mountainside to which he would resort for this purpose, and which lived in her memory as her "brother's pulpit." His fellow-students noted not only the diligence but the success of his efforts. "When he was to preach or to conduct a prayer service," one of them writes, "we students were always present, and we all expected he would make a great and popular preacher." There was one special occasion for the exercise of his gifts arising in the course of his Senior year, to which he looked back as to a kind of epoch in his life. It was in the month of February, 1848. A precious work of grace was going on in the Tennent Church, and Dr. Alexander was applied to for aid. He sent three students, of whom Dr. Paxton was one; and unexpectedly to themselves they were thrust into the thick of the work. "The blessing that rested upon the people," said Dr. Paxton in relating it, "seemed to fall on us." The way one of his fellow-students puts it is, "They conducted the services with marked success."

As his seminary life drew to its close, it became evident enough that such a young man would not go begging for a pulpit. Calls came to him unsought and even somewhat embarrassingly. But the people of his own region who knew him well had been wise enough to forestall all others. Already, on the 16th of February, 1848, "the congregation of East Conococheague, commonly known as Greencastle," had sent him a hearty call and had received assurances of his acceptance. He was on the field as soon as the seminary closed, and was formally ordained and installed on the 4th day of the ensuing October. He was only twenty-four years of age, but was far from a callow and unformed youth. One who knew him

well describes him as at the time "a remarkably handsome young man of a commanding presence, a superb figure, with beautiful eyes and a splendid voice." He was already a "great sermonizer," to whom large congregations listened "with almost breathless attention." It is interesting to learn that he had already worked out that peculiar method of preparing his sermons which he employed throughout life—"walking them out," as he expressed it, that is, mentally composing them as he paced back and forth in his study, thereby wearing a pathway in the carpet which observant visitors used to amuse themselves tracing out. "In 1849–1850," writes my informant, "I was teaching in the Chambersburg Academy, and, as a licentiate, was supplying the church at Fayetteville, five miles out. Mr. Paxton's kindness of heart and friendliness were exhibited in this, that he was willing to come and preach for me. . . . . After dinner Paxton said to me, 'I must be alone this afternoon, to make my preparation to preach this evening.' He told me he had selected Romans iii. 19 for his text. He spent a couple of hours, perhaps more, walking to and fro in the little parlor, arranging his heads of discourse, gathering his illustrations, and going over the words and sentences that he would use—without a book, save the Bible, without a scrap of paper, without pen or pencil. That a man could do such a thing and then preach such a grand and thrilling sermon as we heard that evening filled me with astonishment."

The church of Greencastle was one of those good old churches characteristic of the region, with a membership at the time of about 200 and paying a salary of $600. The reportable results of the young minister's labors during his two years of work there were twenty-one additions on confession of faith, the first fruits of the great number of 609 of whom it was his privilege to become thus the spiritual father before the ministry thus inaugurated reached its close, yielding an average of about eighteen for each year of his active work. From Greencastle he was transferred to Pittsburgh at the end of the year 1850, and was formally installed pastor of the First Presbyterian Church of Pittsburgh on the 28th of the following January. This new church was but little larger in mere number of communicants than the one he had left, but it was of indefinitely more importance, possessing, indeed, a truly metropolitan influence and burdened with thronging metropolitan responsibilities. We cannot stay to tell the story of the young pastor's reception. Suffice it to say that the new pastorate was most auspiciously begun, and its very first months were marked by a work of grace which had scarcely

died away before it was followed by another and stronger wave of interest which not only added largely to the membership of the church, but greatly increased the fervor of its religious life and the energy of its Christian activity. The membership grew steadily throughout the pastorate from 237 at its beginning to 446 at its close. And membership in Mr. Paxton's church—or now, since Jefferson College had honored itself by conferring upon him in 1860 the degree of D.D., we must say Dr. Paxton's—meant something. In reaction against the abounding wickedness of a great city, the ideal of Christian living was cast very high in the First Church of Pittsburgh, and very strict obligations were laid upon its members. From 1860 its protest against the prevalent laxity was embodied in a formal pledge, exacted from those who made confession of their faith, to abstain from such worldly amusements as the opera, theatre, circus, cards, dancing. The measure had at least the effect of compacting the membership into an efficient body of serious men and women who were in earnest in the development of their own spiritual lives, and effective in the campaign against vice. An outward sign of the prosperity of the church was the building of a handsome new edifice in the opening years of the pastorate. But this was only one landmark of a constant growth in strength and influence through these eventful years.

To appreciate how eventful these years were we need only to remind ourselves that within their compass fell the great Civil War, and to recall what that war, quite apart from the upheaval it wrought in the whole land, meant especially for the expansion of Pittsburgh. The anxieties, the responsibilities, the labors that were cast at such a time upon such a church and upon such a pastor, it is difficult for us in these quieter times adequately to estimate. Suffice it to say the strain was borne by congregation and pastor with unfailing dignity and success. Dr. Paxton's personal attitude during this great struggle was that of a convinced and enthusiastic loyalist. In the memorial sermon preached upon his predecessor in the pastorate of the church, Dr. Herron, who died December 8, 1860, he already passionately asserts the "sacredness of the compact which bound these States together." He was not a member of the Assembly of 1861, and I do not know what he thought of the famous "Spring Resolutions" passed there. Possibly, like Dr. Charles Hodge and Dr. Robert J. Breckinridge, that they were *ultra vires*. But if so, this did not in his case, any more than in theirs, affect his profound conviction of the righteousness, nay, the sacredness, of the principles asserted in those resolutions. In the Assembly of 1862,

accordingly—now, alas! no longer the Assembly of the whole land—he cast his vote for Dr. Breckinridge's paper on "The State of the Church and of the Country," in which much the same ground was taken.

On the succeeding Thanksgiving Day—November 28, 1862—he preached a striking sermon, in which sounds the note not only of courageous but of optimistic loyalty, which appears to have rung through his whole life in those dark days. I refer to this sermon here that I may take from it a clause which suggests an interesting incident in Dr. Paxton's life, in which some of the primary traits of his character are revealed. I do not quote this clause, you will observe, as a characteristic one: it is quite possible that in calmer days Dr. Paxton might have modified its phraseology. He is speaking of the last months of Mr. Buchanan's administration, and he characterizes them, shortly, as a period when "imbecility filled the Presidential chair." Now in the closing chapter of Mr. George Ticknor Curtis' *Life of James Buchanan* you will find a beautiful letter from Dr. Paxton, describing how, in August, 1860, when events were already hastening to the dreadful gulf which was opening before the nation—after the division of the Democratic party had been hopelessly accomplished and the election of the Republican candidate was practically assured, and after the speech of July 9, in which Mr. Buchanan cast in his lot with the Southern wing of the Democracy—Dr. Paxton held repeated earnest conferences with Mr. Buchanan on the nature of experimental religion and the significance of a profession of faith in Christ, and received from him assurances of his trust in the Saviour and of his purpose of soon uniting with the Church. It is like an oasis in a thirsty land to fall upon this record of faithful pastoral work in the midst of those tumultuous years. What a light it throws upon the intensity of Dr. Paxton's political convictions, that fresh from these intimate interviews, in which his own heart had been aglow with Christian love, his judgment of his interlocutor's political policy remained absolutely unaffected! But above all, what a sense we obtain of his absorption in his pastoral functions! It is a beautiful sight to see him, in the midst of that violent campaign, when men's passions were stirred to their depths with political rancor, sitting quietly in conference with a political opponent whose dispraise was not only on the lips of all his companions but embedded deeply in his own heart, conversing with him day by day on the serious concerns of the soul, and never, apparently, even tempted to permit the feelings engendered by the political strife to mar the perfection

of his pastoral attitude, or to distort his judgment of the purity of heart of his distinguished disciple. "I have never entertained a doubt of the entire honesty of Mr. Buchanan's religious impressions," he testifies years afterward, "or of the reality of his religious convictions."

No doubt the pastoral instinct and skill revealed in such an incident had much to do with the fruitfulness of his Pittsburgh pastorate. But above everything else Dr. Paxton was, in those Pittsburgh days, the preacher. Coming to them in his youthful vigor, he yet brought with him a perfected homiletical art. From the beginning he easily took rank among the first preachers of the two cities, although there were numbered among them men like Drs. Swift and Howard, Drs. Plummer and Kendall, Drs. Jacobus and Wilson, every one of them, as one of their constant hearers phrases it, "a prince unrivaled in his own style and manner." Dr. Paxton's special "style and manner" involved the most elaborate preparation, and particularly the most exact attention to the structure of his sermons. Some felt that, as a result, they were apt to be even "faultily faultless," and to sacrifice something of fervor to methodical development and grace of expression. This was not, however, the general opinion: his audience-room was ever crowded with eager hearers, and he was sought after on every hand for those occasional addresses for which chaste speech is essential. The themes he chose were ordinarily "those that lie at the heart of the Gospel." "He always gave himself plenty of time, and as a rule took the full hour." "He set his sermon squarely on his text as a tree stands on its tap-root: sent out smaller roots all through the context: the trunk was short and stocky; then he threw out the great branches, following each to its smaller limbs and even twigs, until his sermon stood complete and symmetrical and stately like one of the great live-oaks of California." "His literary style," continues my informant, "was clear, methodical and elevated. His appearance, address and action in the pulpit were those of an Apollo. A more graceful man I have never seen in pulpit or on platform. Tall, slender, erect, faultlessly attired, every motion was easy, natural, dignified and all in perfect taste." Such was Dr. Paxton in his prime, as he appeared in the pulpit—a model preacher, worthy of all imitation in matter and manner alike, while in the art of "dividing a text" he was looked upon as beyond the possibility of imitation.

Is it any wonder that he was greedily coveted by the seminary over in Allegheny? Surely he had been destined and trained just that he might teach young men how to preach! The opportunity

to secure his services for this great work opened at last, we may well believe, somewhat unexpectedly. The authorities of Princeton Seminary appeared at the Assembly of 1860 with a request that a fifth professor be granted them—a Professor of Sacred Rhetoric. As they came with the endowment of the chair in their hands, the request could scarcely be denied. The authorities of the Western Seminary at Allegheny, however, felt they must not be outdone by Princeton; and they succeeded in persuading Dr. Paxton to undertake the teaching of sacred rhetoric in that institution as its fifth professor. But as they had no funds provided for his support, with characteristic generosity he gave his services to the seminary for the whole period of his occupancy of the chair (1860–1872) entirely gratuitously.

Precisely what the Directors of the Western Theological Seminary desired of Dr. Paxton, and precisely what he undertook at their importunity, was to come and teach the students to preach as he preached. They saw in him a model preacher, into the likeness of whom they earnestly desired that their students might be moulded. He saw in the task that had come to him unsought an opportunity, not to philosophize upon the principles that underlie the homiletical art, nor to discuss the nature of preaching as a literary form, but simply to show the young men gathered in the seminary how to do it. If there ever was a preacher in the chair of preaching it was Dr. Paxton. At the first, indeed, it may well have seemed to the Allegheny students that there was little essential difference between his lectures and the sermons they were flocking to hear from him Sabbath by Sabbath over in Pittsburgh. He opened his course with a series of what may very well be called sermons on the preachers of the Bible, beginning with Enoch and running regularly down to our Lord and His apostles—sermons marked by all that closeness of scrutiny of the text, faithful eliciting of its substance and powerful application of its lessons which characterized all his preaching. Only, as he was now addressing not a general audience but a body of prospective preachers, the lessons which he pressed upon their consciences were lessons for preachers. In reading over the notes of these lectures, I have been deeply impressed by their value as a preparation for entering upon a formal study of Homiletics. Account for it as we may, the study of the formal arts is apt to be approached by students in a somewhat light spirit; and even what we call "sacred rhetoric" has not always escaped this fate. I cannot conceive, however, a serious-minded student approaching the temple through the propylæum which these opening sermons of

Dr. Paxton's built for it without putting the sandals once for all off his feet. And I am disposed to think that a large part of the power exerted by Dr. Paxton as a teacher of Homiletics was due to the success with which he induced and maintained in his pupils a sense of the holiness and responsibility of a preacher's function. With all the attention he gave to their form, sermons after all were to him interesting chiefly because of their substance and of their purpose: and he kept his students constantly aware of the sacredness of their substance and the holiness of their purpose. When he tells them in these opening lectures that "the true idea of preaching is the explanation of the Word of God"—that "the object of preaching is nothing else but to make clear what the Lord has taught"—he sounds the keynote of his entire Homiletical instruction.

When, these introductory lectures being over, Dr. Paxton passes to the direct inculcation of the art of sacred rhetoric, his main characteristic as a teacher of Homiletics springs at once into its fullest manifestation. I mean his intense practicality. The lectures are analytical and precise: the entire subject of sacred rhetoric is developed in them with formal completeness: but the whole tone and effect is that of a master-workman training his apprentices in the practice of an art. It is perfectly clear that Dr. Paxton is simply showing his pupils how to do what he has himself been accustomed to do with so great success; taking them into his confidence, so to speak, and making them free of the secrets of the trade. And this effect is powerfully reinforced by another striking element in his teaching—what we may call its empirical basis. Discarding all *à priori* theorizing as to what a sermon ought to be, he had set himself to make a survey of the existing sermonic literature with a view to ascertaining what, as an actual fact, good sermons are. His enunciations of the principles of sermon-building had in them, therefore, the vitality that comes from touch with the real.

The results of his exhaustive study of English sermonic literature he incorporated especially in lectures on the various methods of unfolding themes and later on the several classes of sermons. These lectures may justly be regarded as the heart of his instruction in Homiletics. He placed a very high value upon this elaborate piece of inductive work; and if he can be said to have had a hobby it must be discovered in his untiring zeal for sermonic analysis. His own skill in "dividing a theme" was remarkable; and he held it to be the highest accomplishment of a preacher to possess the power to distribute a text into its natural divisions, so that its entire message might be developed in an easy and effective presentation. He there-

fore begrudged no time or labor spent in cultivating this talent in his pupils; he not only presented the subject elaborately in his lectures, accompanied with abundant illustration, but diligently trained his pupils in the practice of the art, and himself set them an example which they might emulate but could scarcely hope to equal.

What now it is particularly interesting to observe is that all this was just as true of Dr. Paxton the first year of his teaching at Allegheny as it was the last year of his teaching at Princeton. One of the surprises which were brought to me by reading over the notes of his first year's lectures at Allegheny was the discovery that his elaborate scheme of sermonic division lay already complete in them. Certain minor adjustments were subsequently made, and the illustrative examples were increased and modified; but the scheme is there in its entirety. All this wide-reaching study of sermonic literature, all this elaborate induction of the proper structure of a sermon,—it had all been carried through by the young pastor for his own personal benefit, and the results were ready for presentation to his pupils from the first. This young pastor, you will see, was certainly diligent in business, and notably illustrated in his own person the prescription for success in sermonizing he was accustomed to give in these words: "Work! work! work!"

The Pittsburgh pastorate came to an end in the midsummer of 1865. The circumstances which brought it to a close recall us to Dr. Paxton's private life. Here, too, he filled out the measure of a normal human experience and was not left without the chastening of sorrow. Shortly after coming to Pittsburgh he married: but soon lost both wife and child. It was not until late in 1855 (Nov. 8) that his household was established by a marriage with one who might well be called a daughter of the church indeed,—Miss Caroline Sophia Denny, whose distinguished father, the Hon. Harmar Denny, had served the church with rare devotion as an elder for a generation, and whose grandfather, Major Ebenezer Denny, had been identified with its fortunes almost from its origin. In her Dr. Paxton found a modern example of that ideal wife described in the closing chapter of Proverbs, and of her the declaration was preëminently true that "the heart of her husband trusted in her." It would be impossible to separate her part from his in the achievements of their joint life. The oldest son of this marriage—in 1865 a boy approaching his fifth birthday—was subject to an asthmatic affection to which the thick air of Pittsburgh was fatal. There was nothing for it but to seek a more salubrious atmosphere.

So soon as it was known that Dr. Paxton was severing his relations with the Pittsburgh church he was besieged with applications for his services. Among other applicants the Board of Education sought him for its Secretaryship. In the end he accepted a call to the First Presbyterian Church in New York, into the pastorate of which he was formally installed on February 1, 1866.

In removing from Pittsburgh to New York, the centre of gravity of his work, so to speak, somewhat changed. In Pittsburgh everything ran up to the pulpit as its head: in New York it was rather the work of administration which took the central place. At no other period of his life was his preaching more admired: but the relative importance of preaching in the impact of his church on the world was less in New York than in Pittsburgh. The First Church of New York was the centre of the most ramified charities. It was veritably the mother church of the city, from which flowed forth nourishment for every religious and benevolent enterprise. "No one can study the history of this church," Dr. Paxton has himself remarked, "without being impressed and amazed at the streams of beneficent influence that have gone out from this source, and at the manner in which this church has been intimately connected with all those great moral, religious, benevolent, philanthropic and patriotic agencies which, from the very earliest times, controlled the formative influences in the growth and development of this great city." Not content with lavishing its fostering care upon charitable organizations—churches, schools, colleges, seminaries, hospitals, asylums—at home, and becoming "literally a 'fountain of living waters'" to the Boards of the Church, it had gone as far afield for objects of its beneficence as worthy needs could be discovered. "Dr. Chalmers' great schemes for the Church of Scotland received their first encouragement here," and through many years continued support. Much of the work of the Waldensian Church in Italy was made possible only by aid from this church, and its theological seminary at Florence was built from this source. Into the midst of this abundant stream of wisely directed beneficence Dr. Paxton came in 1866, when it was running so full that, like Jordan in the time of harvest, it was overflowing all its banks. The contributions of the church to the Board of Foreign Missions alone during his pastorate averaged nearly $30,000 annually and aggregated more than half a million. Other things were in proportion. To name but a single item, the Presbyterian Hospital was rendered possible only by a gift from Mr. James Lenox. He, of course, was the greatest giver, but not the only great giver. Mrs. Winthrop, for example,

whose splendid bequest this seminary hopes soon to enter into the enjoyment of, placed a large sum annually in Dr. Paxton's hands to be distributed at his discretion.

As pastor of this church Dr. Paxton became, therefore, very much a man of affairs, an almoner to the Church universal. "His labors during this period," as one who knew him well and watched his work with sympathetic eye remarks, "were enormous, and yet they were transacted with a kind of calmness and equipoise which never failed to impress one with the sense of a great deal of reserve power." As pastor of the First Church, he was *ex officio* a member of the Boards of three noble charities: the Presbyterian Hospital, the Leake and Watts Orphan House and the Sailors' Snug Harbor. The Boards of the Church claimed his services: he was elected a member of both the Home and Foreign Mission Boards; and served the former until 1880, as President from 1876 to 1878; and the latter until his death, as President from 1881 to 1883. While at Pittsburgh he had, of course, been a Director of the Western Theological Seminary (from 1851); and he was also a Trustee of Jefferson College (from 1853). Coming to New York he substituted for these the Directorship of the Seminary (from 1866) and the Trusteeship of the College (from 1867) at Princeton—in the former of which he served until his election as professor in the institution (1883), and in the latter until his death. In addition he was chosen Trustee of Union Theological Seminary in 1873, and served until his removal to Princeton in 1883. His appointment as Trustee of the General Assembly (1892) came later, but may be mentioned here for the sake of completeness. All these positions of trust he filled not only with dignity, but with a careful attention to their duties and with a wisdom of counsel which earned the unaffected admiration of his coadjutors. In addition to the cares they brought him, he acted as lecturer on "Homiletics and Sacred Rhetoric" in the Union Theological Seminary, New York, during the years from 1872 to 1875—repeating there his Allegheny lectures to the satisfaction of both the governors and pupils of the institution.

The greatest ecclesiastical event which occurred during Dr. Paxton's New York ministry was, of course, the reunion of the Old and New School branches of the Church. He was of the number of those who did not look with satisfaction on the movement for union. Oddly enough, however, as a member of the Assembly of 1862, when corresponding delegates to the New School body were for the first time appointed, and of that of 1870, when the consummated union was set upon its feet, he was an active factor in both

the beginning and end of the movement. Except so far as was involved in becoming a signatory of the Pittsburgh Circular of 1868–9, I do not know that he took any large part in the debates of the time. When once the union was accomplished, however, he became one of the chief agents in adjusting the relations of the two so-long separated bodies. No one, for example, was more influential than he at the Assembly of 1870 in determining the formal adjustments. And in general it is not too much to say that his attitude of "loyal and affectionate adherence to the interests of the united Church," and his cordial and appreciative intercourse with the formerly New School men, were among the most powerful influences which were working toward the healing of old wounds. When he came to New York, very little active fellowship existed between ministers serving in the two Churches: he was scarcely more than on the footing of speaking acquaintance with his nearest ministerial neighbors of the other communion. Immediately after the union, however, all this was changed. He rapidly formed close friendships with his New School colleagues—with Dr. William Adams, first of all, for whom he cherished a boundless reverence; with Drs. Henry B. Smith, Thomas H. Skinner, Robert R. Booth, Howard Crosby, Charles H. Robinson. He was, of course, elected at once to the famous Ministerial Club, *Chi Alpha*, where his social intercourse with his brethren found a centre; and even, as we have seen, was shortly lecturing in Union Seminary and holding a permanent position on its Board of government. When, at the unveiling of the tablet to Dr. Archibald Alexander's memory, at Princeton Seminary, he declared in his half-humorous way, "It is wicked now for any one to have memory enough to recollect that there was ever anything but one happy, undivided Presbyterian Church," he preached nothing but what he practiced.

With the origin of the General Presbyterian Alliance also he had a somewhat close connection. He was a delegate to the first meeting of its Council, at Edinburgh (July, 1877), and delivered there an address on Home Missions in America. It fell to him to preach the opening sermon at the second Council, which met in Philadelphia, September, 1880. Meanwhile he had been sent to the General Assembly of 1880, and had been elevated to its Moderatorship by acclamation—an honor which has been accorded to very few in the history of the Church. At the opening of the ensuing Assembly (1881) he preached what seems to me at least an even more notable sermon than the much-admired discourse which he delivered at the opening of the Alliance. These two meetings of the Alliance and

the five Assemblies which have been adverted to—those of 1860, 1862, 1870, 1880, 1881—seem to be all those to which he was accredited as a Commissioner. He never shirked any duty that was laid upon him, but he did not seek the supreme court of the Church as his chosen field of labor. He had been twelve years in the ministry before he was sent to the Assembly: he remained twenty-three years in the ministry after his last service as a member of the Assembly. They were a curiously notable series of Assemblies, however, in which he served: 1860, when the great debate on the organization of the Boards, running out in its ramifications into the whole theory of Presbyterianism, was held, and Drs. Hodge and Thornwell met in titanic conflict; 1862, in the midst of the excitement of the war, when the air was palpitant with internecine strife; 1870, when the union between the two Churches was given effect in an infinite variety of adjustments; 1880 and 1881, when the debates on the Revised Book of Discipline took place and the reorganization of the Synods was effected.

And now we approach the last stadium of Dr. Paxton's active service. In 1883 he came to Princeton to take up the work of the Chair of Ecclesiastical, Homiletical and Pastoral Theology, made vacant by the resignation of Dr. McGill. His church, which had grown steadily under his hands from the 257 members it reported in 1866 to the 409 it reported in 1883, and whose affection for its pastor had grown with the years, was loath to give him up. He himself, to whom preaching was as his vital breath, was loath to give it up. The professor's chair was no novelty to him; but the professor's chair alone—it was difficult for him to reconcile himself to that. One of his early pupils at Princeton recalls a scene on the occasion of a visit of Mr. Moody to Princeton, when Dr. Paxton was with that great revivalist in the inquiry room. "I see him now," he writes, "his face working with emotion, too much overcome at one time by his feelings to be able to lead in prayer. The next day in the classroom he told us he was homesick for the pastorate." But God's work must be done; and Dr. Paxton was accustomed to do it: and he felt at least that next to preaching itself the training of preachers was the most blessed of services.

The chair to which he consecrated the remainder of his life, it will be observed, was a much more comprehensive one than that which he had occupied at Allegheny and New York. It included, as he was accustomed to point out, three separate branches of instruction. During the first years of his occupancy of it, he naturally fell back upon his Allegheny lectures in Homiletics and directed

his energies to the creation of a course of lectures in Church Government, using meanwhile, in Pastoral Theology, a text-book which he supplemented from his own experience. In 1888 and 1889 he turned back to the lectures on Homiletics and largely remodeled them, retaining, however, permanently the core of his Allegheny lectures. I suppose we all recognize that it was in these Homiletical lectures, supplemented by his practical drilling of the students in preaching and text-dividing, that Dr. Paxton's work of instruction culminated.

As at Allegheny so at Princeton it was his practical genius which informed all his teaching. No note is struck more persistently by his pupils in their reminiscences of his classroom than this. Says one: "I found his course exceedingly helpful. I can hardly conceive of a more thorough and suggestive series of lectures on Homiletics than that which he gave us. . . . . I found them practically of the greatest value in my own work as a preacher; so much so that when I went to India I delivered in Hindustani the substance of his course, in a brief series, to the students in the training-school for preachers with which I was connected." Says another: "He was eminently a pastor in the pastoral chair. The teaching was concrete. . . . . He taught not so much the philosophy as the art. . . . but with devotional spirituality, on a high level and with just balance. . . . . His teaching of ecclesiastical law was especially pleasant. He was a stout Presbyterian, and bated no jot of constitution or deliverance, but he was not dry nor deadly technical. He evidently knew the law and had seen its practical workings, but he never forgot that the great thing was the life and progress of the Church, and that ecclesiasticism was not an end in itself." Says yet another: "The most valuable part of Dr. Paxton's work, as far as I was concerned, was his Pastoral Theology. Many of the suggestions he gave me I found to be workable and helpful. I was especially helped by his cautions what not to do. I may say that in practical work outside the pulpit, Dr. Paxton gave me more help than any one I have ever known."

With all this, however, it was not after all his practical genius which was the chief note of Dr. Paxton's work in the seminary. That was rather what one of his pupils we have just quoted calls his "devotional spirituality." Above everything else his heart was set on quickening in his students' minds a sense of the sacredness of their calling and on fanning the fires of their spiritual life into a blaze. A fervent and devoted heart he held to be the best preparation for preaching the Gospel. His sermons, his conference talks—both

of which were greatly enjoyed by his pupils,—his prayers, in which he was mighty before God, and indeed his whole intercourse with the student body wrought together powerfully to this result. He had a happy habit of addressing a few words to each class at the opening of the scholastic year, with a view to awakening them to a sense of their opportunities and responsibilities as soldiers of Christ. Some of the memoranda of these little addresses have got caught between the leaves of his lecture-notes, and so have come to our hands. Here is a sample of them, addressed to the Senior class:

> "Have known you well as Juniors and Middlers.
> Congratulate you on your advancement as Seniors.
> Involves responsibility.
> Influence of Senior Class.
> Think of your position.
> Good use of this year.
> 1. Try to grow in piety.
> 2. Don't trifle away time upon
> Too much preaching,
> Seeking a call."

It is particularly needful to attend to these traits in Dr. Paxton's work in the seminary, because there lay behind them a definitely formed and tenaciously held theory of the functions of theological seminaries which he never lost an opportunity to enunciate and enforce. To him theological seminaries were specifically training-schools for the ministry, and he earnestly desired that they should be administered strictly on this principle and to this end. There was nothing he feared more than "scholasticism" in our seminaries. The liveliness of this fear, I cannot but think, betrayed him now and again into judgments and expressions which were somewhat extreme. He was perfectly clear that the minister should be soundly educated, and, indeed, when that is possible without loss of spiritual power or spiritual opportunity, profoundly learned: and he was ready to grant that, therefore, rich provision for communicating knowledge must be made in our seminaries. But he was perhaps overapt to see the spectre of "scholasticism" lurking behind measures the practical value of which for the average ministerial preparation was not immediately apparent. After all said, however, what he took his real stand upon was the perfectly sound position that our theological seminaries are primarily training-schools for ministers, and must be kept fundamentally true to this their proper work.

From this point of view he was never weary of warning those who were charged with the administration of these institutions against

permitting them to degenerate into mere schools of dry-as-dust and, from the spiritual standpoint, useless learning. A very fair example of his habitual modes of thought and speech on this subject may be read in the charge which he delivered to his life-long friend, Dr. A. A. Hodge—whom he loved as a brother and admired as a saint of God—when Dr. Hodge was inaugurated as professor in this seminary. Permitting himself greater freedom, doubtless, because he knew he was addressing one sympathetic to his contentions, he becomes in this address almost fierce in his denunciations of a scholastic conception of theological training, and insistent to the point of menace in his assertion of the higher duty of the theological instructor. Pointing to the seminary buildings—he was speaking in the First Church—he exclaimed: "There stands that venerable institution. What does it mean? What is the idea it expresses? . . . . Is it a place where young men get a profession by which they are to make their living? Is it a school in which a company of educated young men are gathered to grind out Theology, to dig Hebrew roots, to read Patristic literature, to become proficients in ecclesiastical dialectics, to master the mystic technics of the schoolmen, and to debate about fate, free-will, and the divine decrees? If this be its purpose, or its chief purpose, then bring the torch and burn it! . . . . We do not in any way depreciate a learned ministry. We must have learning. . . . . But whenever in a theological seminary learning takes the precedence, it covers as with an icicle the very truths which God designed to warm and melt the hearts of men. . . . . No, no, this is not the meaning of a theological seminary. . . . . It is a school of learning, but it is also a cradle of piety." Accordingly he exhorts in almost flaming speech the individual professor to look well to his personal responsibility. Let no one dare say, he cries, that his business is to teach only a certain section of theological science. His duty is not merely the impartation of "a certain *quantum* of information on a given subject," but to take his part in the training and inspiring of men to save souls. "I stand here to-day," he solemnly declares, "to say to you and to every member of this faculty, '*This* is your department!'" "The professor's study must be a Bethel in direct communication with heaven; and a theological seminary must be a Bochim from which strong cries for help are constantly going up." Such was Dr. Paxton's ideal of a seminary. He preached it without cessation. And he lived up to it. His own study was a Bethel: his own classroom was a Bochim.

I have said nothing about Dr. Paxton's literary output. It is a

subject which does not suggest itself with reference to him. The *cacoethes scribendi* is a disease to which he was immune. He had no literary ambitions. His chosen method of expression was oral: with this I will not say merely he was content; he seemed to have even a distaste for the pen and a positive dislike for print. He did not even write his sermons; and we may be sure that he wrote his lectures only as a concession to a hard necessity. To write for the sake of writing, to print for the sake of printing, would have seemed to him almost a superfluity of naughtiness. I believe the only review article he ever printed was one on "The Call to the Ministry," which he gave me for the first number of *The Presbyterian Review*, of which I was an editor; and even that had not been written in the first instance for publication. He also gave me for that and the next number a couple of short book notices; and later—for *The Presbyterian and Reformed Review*—a loving obituary tribute to his old friend, Mr. A. D. F. Randolph. I am very proud of these tokens of his regard, knowing well that nothing but affection can account for them. It could not be, however, but that some of the sermons of a man so justly famous for his sermons should find their way into print: and naturally a number of the occasional addresses of one so sought after for occasional addresses failed to evade publication. Thus it happens that, after all, a considerable body of printed material remains to preserve to us some suggestion of this winning speaker's manner. Some thirty separate items have come under my eye. Among them perhaps special mention should be made of his elaborate scheme of Divisions of Sermons which he permitted late in life to be printed, not published, for the use of his classes. Those who are fortunate enough to possess copies of it will feel that they have in it a part of Dr. Paxton himself.

Dr. Paxton was permitted to labor among us here in Princeton for a period of twenty years. He had already entered his sixtieth year when he came to us (1883): he was approaching his seventy-eighth birthday when he was impelled to seek relief from his responsibilities; and he had reached his eightieth year and had completed the full tale of twenty years of service before he ceased to deliver lectures in the seminary. The burden of years as they gathered upon his shoulders never dimmed his eye, nor bowed his form, nor halted his step. But yielding to the requisitions of his physicians, he asked to be released from the cares of office at the close of the academic year of 1901–1902. During the protracted illness of Dr. William Henry Green, he had, in addition to the conduct of his chair of instruction, discharged also many of the duties

of head of the seminary; and from February 10, 1900, when Dr. Green died, he had been formally, as well as really, its head. What it meant to him to unbuckle the harness he had so long worn no one will ever fully know. He has himself, in his encomium on his predecessor in the pastorate of the First Church of Pittsburgh, eloquently portrayed the trials which accompany such an experience. If he passed through such a testing time it was concealed from the observer. It impressed no frown upon his brow: it wrung from his heart no repining cry.

Nor, in any true sense of the word, can it be said that his work was over when he turned away for the last time from his classroom door, and descended forever the pulpit steps—that pulpit which had, through all these years, been his throne from which he ruled as king. Changed, not completed, his work: perhaps we should not even say changed. For Dr. Paxton's power always lay more in what he was than in what he did, and the best of all his sermons was the sermon he preached by his life—by the benignity of his bearing, the thoughtful charity of his intercourse with men, the very glow of his serene countenance.

> Affectionate in look
> And tender in address, as well becomes
> A messenger of grace to guilty men,

he was the living embodiment of Cowper's ideal of the faithful pastor. Students have declared that it was a benediction simply to sit in the Oratory of Stuart Hall and look upon his devout countenance as he sat on the platform. Ladies have remarked that to encounter him casually in the street of a morning brought a blessing upon the day. "No one could fail to see the reflection of the Lord upon his face," or "to feel faith revived and courage strengthened and love deepened as they listened to his cheery voice and perceived whence the springs of his life flowed." And so, as he went back and forth to the devotional exercises of the seminary, of which he was a faithful and devout attendant to the end; and as he walked daily through the streets; though his voice was no longer heard in classroom or pulpit, he was still our teacher and our preacher.

"There will be work for you at the last," says Dr. Robertson Niccoll, in one of his searching addresses—"not the old work. . . . . The misery in which Christian lives often close is largely due to the attempt to continue work for which the toiler has ceased to be fit. Leave that, and there is other work. The cities of Israel are not gone over. . . . . The orator may have to content himself with

pen. The preacher may have to step from prominence to obscurity. But whosoever has passed over the enchanted ground to Beulah is a mighty influence. His force is not to be measured by the old tests, but it radiates from him continually. It keeps silently conquering new fields and is unspent at death." We have seen these words fulfilled before our eyes. During these last years Dr. Paxton abode in the land of Beulah, and there radiated from him

> The splendour of a spirit without blame.

At the last the end came with a certain suddenness, but with no shock. There was nothing in its circumstances to mar the impression of the peaceful days which preceded it. Even while on earth he had flung his heart before him—like the Bruce's—into heaven. It had been observed that he had talked much of the heavenly rest during the last months. It seemed in no wise strange that he should go whither his heart had preceded him. He came to his grave in a full age, like as a shock of corn cometh in its season; and as we laid the body away in the profound conviction that—as the beautiful words in our Larger Catechism express it—it shall "even in death continue united to Christ and rest in its grave as in its bed, till at the last day it be again united with its soul"—what could our hearts say, except

> O weary champion of the cross, lie still:
> Sleep thou at length the all-embracing sleep:
> Long was thy sowing day, rest now and reap:
> Thy fast was long, feast now thy spirit's fill.

Princeton. BENJAMIN B. WARFIELD.