

Memorial Services

of

Dr. Henry Alexander White

Professor of New Testament Literature and Exegesis.
1903-1926



Born April 15, 1861-Died Oct. 10, 1926.



President, Richard T. Gillespie, Presiding



Program

<i>Hymn 670</i>	“SERVANT OF GOD, WELL DONE”
<i>Prayer</i>	REV. W. M. MCPHEETERS, D.D.
<i>Address</i>	DR. G. A. WAUCHOPE
<i>Address</i>	REV. CHAS. P. COBLE
<i>Hymn 609</i>	“FOR ALL THE SAINTS, O LORD”
<i>Address</i>	REV. NEAL L. ANDERSON, D.D.
<i>Prayer and Benediction</i>	REV. R. T. GILLESPIE, D.D.

Henry Alexander White: College Student and Historian

By GEORGE ARMSTRONG WAUCHOPE, Ph.D., Litt. D.

Doctor White's death came to me with the shock of a deep and poignant personal loss. As the lengthening shadow of time stretches out farther and farther across our life's pathway, the comrades of our early manhood,—the closest friendships one ever forms,—become fewer and fewer. The encroaching thought of one's own mortality, too, causes one to become more sensible of the inestimable but irrevocable value of the lost friends of yesteryears. With the passing of our lamented friend old ties of college days were rudely severed by "the abhorred shears," and the later but still intimate associations as neighbor, club-mate, fellow-teacher, and brother in Christ were broken. It is, therefore, a peculiarly sad and valued privilege that this memorial service brings me of paying a simple tribute to one whom I have long known, loved, and lost awhile. Like Shakespeare's Brutus,

"His life was gentle, and the elements
So mixed in him that nature might stand up
And say to all the world, 'This was a man!'"

Henry Alexander White was born on April 15, 1861, and reared in Greenbrier County, then in Virginia. His parents, William Orr and Mary McClure (Irwin) White, both came of sturdy Scotch-Irish pioneer stock. His preparation for college was received in a parochial school near Hillsdale Presbyterian Church. His father, a farmer with a small income, did not feel able to send his son to college; but his mother, like Samuel's, a woman of rare energy, consecration, and foresight, assumed the responsibility for her boy's higher education, and by great sacrifices provided for his first year's expenses out of her own industry and frugal savings.

Harry White, or "H.A.", as he was familiarly known on the campus, entered Washington and Lee University in the fall of 1881, and proved to be one of the most brilliant, solid, and distinguished students who have attended that institution. How vividly I recall his appearance when he applied for matriculation,—a rather rugged, robust figure with somewhat massive features, brave, eager, friendly eyes ready to face the world unafraid, and with a great shock of dark hair. Evidently he was a man able to endure hardship, with quiet reserves of vital energy, kindling ambitions, and bound on an insatiable quest for knowledge. He boarded about a mile from Lexington in the country at a Mr. Barclay's, where a few years before the great Hellenist, Milton W. Humphreys, in the bucolic environment of the barnyard, had been overheard haranging the geese and mules in the eclogues of Theocritus. Such was White's health and hardihood that he never missed a class even in winter. The daily walk and chopping his own firewood supplied him with all the exercise he needed.

Such was the earnestness, tenacity and vigor with which he attacked his studies that in a few months he had won among his professors and classmates a reputation for scholarship that is usually not attained or recognized before the Junior year. He seemed to us undergraduates equally successful in all his subjects,—mathematics, physics, chemistry, Latin, Greek, ethics, philosophy, French, history, and English language and literature, taken under as diverse types of instructors as the wise, jovial James J. White, the ascetic scholarly Harrison, the stern, exacting Nelson, the brilliant caustic Harris, the eloquent, benign Kirkpatrick, the friendly and versatile Moreland, and the fatherly, benevolent Campbell.

He found time to join the Washington Literary Society, and with characteristic perseverance and courage set himself to the up-hill task,—to a blunt, unpolished, plain-spoken mountaineer an onerous one,—to learn to speak in public. For alphabetical reasons he and I were frequently assigned as opponents in debate. As George Bernard Shaw says of his similar experience in the Fabian Society, we were willing to make fools of ourselves to learn to talk on our feet. White

mastered the difficult art, but in doing so had the nerve to bore the Society, frequently volunteering for duty. I am sure that those present will bear witness to his ultimate success, as he became a clear, fluent, thought-provoking speaker, and on occasion a forceful and eloquent one. White's motto might well have been that of the Campbell Clan, "Ready," for, as honor after honor came to him, he was always prepared to meet successfully each responsible task, whether it were the editorship of **The Southern Collegian**, the presidency of his literary society, or valedictorian of his class. Once a senior student chosen to represent our Society in an oratorical contest at Finals resigned, and White, though a freshman, was urged to take his place on perilously short notice. He did so, won the contest and a \$50 gold medal. The next year he won the famous and coveted Santine \$60 medal for the best essay, the Senior Greek prize, and another for the highest scholarship. After his freshman year he paid his expenses by winning a \$300 scholarship, and later a \$500 Fellowship which he held for two years. It was no accident that one of his favorite expressions in prayer was, "and give us good success."

In 1885 he graduated with the degree of M.A., and two years later received the Ph.D. **magna cum laude**. For several years it had been his desire to enter the ministry, and he now lost no time in carrying out his plans. His theological training was received first at Union Theological Seminary then located at Hampden-Sidney in Prince Edward County, Virginia, and subsequently at Princeton, where he graduated in 1889. He was licensed by Lexington Presbytery in May and in August he was ordained evangelist.

On July 18 he was married to Miss Fanny Beverley Wellford, daughter of Judge Beverley Randolph Wellford of Richmond, Va., a ruling elder in the First Presbyterian Church, and an official of the War Department during the Confederate war. The Judge said that he "had known many splendid men, but White's superior never," and that "with such an intellect he had never seen such modesty." Richly endowed with all the social graces and accomplishments that have distinguished her patrician family for generations, Mrs. White ably assisted her gifted husband in

making their several homes in Lexington, Columbia, and Richmond hospitable centers of artistic culture, brilliant conversation, and social intercourse, intellectual salons, the fragrant memories of which still abide in the hearts of hundreds of students, colleagues, and other friends who were privileged to enjoy their old Southern hospitality. They had brought back from the art centers of Europe hundreds of beautiful copies or photographs of the famous masterpieces of the world. Their home in Gibbes Court was in a sense for many years an art gallery for Columbia. I trust I may be pardoned for drawing the sacred veil of domestic privacy for a moment to give this glimpse of their beautiful and perfect union. "All who knew him best," writes his broken-hearted widow, "and were with him daily, felt that he was almost a perfect character, . . . I knew that he was God's best gift to me."

Following his graduation at Princeton, Doctor White returned to his Alma Mater, Washington and Lee, on the faculty of which he served as Professor of History from 1889 to 1902, a chair that was created especially for him by the Board of Trustees. During these laborious and fruitful years he served, as stated supply, neighboring churches at Collierstown, Timber Ridge, Buena Vista, and Oxford, preaching regularly on Sundays in addition to his heavy professorial duties. During these years also he received flattering calls elsewhere, among them the offer of the presidency of Central University, Ky.

In 1903, Professor White was called to the important chair of New Testament Literature and Exegesis in the Columbia Theological Seminary, a position which he accepted and filled ably until the time of his death. He was a born scholar and teacher; and he had entered upon the work of the new session with joy in the prospect of having the largest Junior class in the history of the Seminary, when his fatal illness overtook him. For several years he had been in failing health due to heart trouble, the burden of which he bore with cheerful fortitude and a calm and Christian patience that elicited the admiration of those closest to him. His last illness developed as a throat infection, which at first caused him no special concern. The ail-

ment, however, did not yield to treatment, and a specialist was consulted. Despite skilled medical care the trouble, which had seemed so slight, grew steadily worse, and in three days had created a critical condition that caused alarm to his wife and friends. The situation was aggravated by the fact that he had small reserves of physical strength. The infection grew steadily worse, and there was grave danger at one time of suffocation. This he escaped, but at three-thirty o'clock on Sunday morning, October 10, 1926, he quietly entered into the rest that remaineth to the people of God, a heavenly Sabbath that shall never end. The fatal issue was due rather to the exhaustion of his vital powers than to the immediate effect of his inflamed throat. The summons found him as ever at his post of duty, for he had met his classes as late as the Wednesday before his death, and only the week previous he had delivered a series of most impressive lectures on the Holy Spirit before the faculty and student body in the Seminary Chapel.

After a touching service on the afternoon of October 10 at his residence on Barnwell Street, which was conducted by the Rev. Prof. W. M. McPheeters, D.D., LL.D., of the Seminary faculty, his body was taken to the Chapel, where it lay in state for two days under the watchful guard of his beloved students until the hour of the funeral on Tuesday. This solemn and beautiful service was conducted by the Rev. Prof. Richard T. Gillespie, President of the Seminary, assisted by the Rev. Dr. McPheeters and the Rev. Robert A. Lapsley, Jr., D.D., pastor of the First Presbyterian Church of Columbia. The remains were then taken to Richmond, Virginia, where they were committed to their final resting place in historic Hollywood Cemetery.

Others will doubtless speak of Doctor White's distinguished linguistic attainments, of his success in business, of his eminence as preacher, scholar, theologian, educator, and presbyter, of his genial and magnetic personality. It remains for me to say something of his work as historian, in which he found the most congenial field for his activities as research scholar and litterateur. The history of the South was his specialty, his earliest and his latest love, and here he attained national recognition as an authority.

Soon after coming to Columbia Doctor White set himself to the task of preparing a series of excellent school histories inspired with the patriotic desire that the children of the South should be taught the truth. Among these are a "History of the United States," "A Beginners' History of the United States," "The Making of South Carolina," a biographical sketch of John C. Calhoun for **The Library of Southern Literature**, and articles in "**The South in the Building of the Nation.**" In all these works his sense of justice is manifest; it was with him a passion, a matter of conscience. The old Conventer fighting blood was strong in this sweet and gentle soul on questions of principle. As a teacher at Washington and Lee he made every effort to find the text-books that were most just and impartial. For example, he used a "History of the United States" by Doyle, an Englishman. He had observed that the histories in general use were by men of Northern birth and education, and that as a consequence the events in the author's section were fully treated, whereas much of interest in other sections was either briefly mentioned or altogether omitted. The Northern point of view was adequately stated, while the Southern was not. Poems and stories of famous men were given for one section, and the other neglected. He therefore set as his goal "to write impartially of all sections," but to take "special pains to give full justice to the part played by the people and states of the South at all periods of American history."

Locally White's most interesting book is "The Making of South Carolina," a volume written for **The Stories of the States Series**. His structural plan, a very original and happy one, was to arrange a series of vivid biographical sketches of men who had taken a leading part in events in such a close and chronological order as to furnish a continuous historical narrative. This appeal to the normal youth's hero-worship resulted in a work of unusual value and appeal.

While occupying his chair of History in Lexington he contributed to **The Heroes of the Nations Series** his popular life of the great Southern leader entitled "Robert E. Lee and the Southern Confederacy." In a recent letter received from

mented. All statements are based upon public records or the original writings of those who had a share in the events. His pen-portraits of these famous men are vitalized by a warm human touch, and his picturesque stories of heroic deeds are energized by imagination and brightened by grace of style. He forged for his vehicle a style that was at once clear, strong, and colorful. His sentences have a graceful swing and easy rhythm. The thought is freshly phrased, and is often touched with a glint of humor. His was the happy faculty of transmuting the dry, raw materials of history into a vitalized story that is highly stimulating to the reader.

A third group of his writings should be mentioned which are more closely related to his work at the Seminary. He made a valuable contribution to a subject of biblical controversy in his treatise on "The Pentateuch in the Light of the Ancient Monuments," to his special field in an excellent "Harmony of the Gospels," and a study of "The Gospel of Comfort," in his Princeton Lectures on the Stone Foundation, and to the history of his church in his great work on "Southern Presbyterian Leaders" (1911). In this monumental volume he traced the history of our Church from the coming of the Scotch and Huguenots to the Carolinas and Virginia after 1683 down to the present century. He employed his favorite method of combining historical narrative with graphic pen-portraits of outstanding leaders like Howe, Plumer, Thornwell, Palmer, Dabney, Wilson, Robinson, Armstrong, Hoge, and Samuel M. Smith. He included such representatives of the eldership as Stonewall Jackson, D. H. Hill, and Thomas R. Cobb. This labor, too, involved exhaustive research into the minutes of the Church courts from Presbytery to General Assembly, personal letters and family records. It was the author's purpose that these sketches taken together would "constitute in some measure a continuous narrative dealing with the work and the character of the Presbyterian people of our Southern Commonwealths," and that men everywhere might learn from these typical worthies "to understand the piety, the integrity, and the intelligence that have through many generations found a home among the people of the South."

honor, truth, and courtesy, "traveling on life's common way in cheerful godliness," loyal to the finest traditions of the old, conservative South, and a splendid exemplar of the forward-looking spirit of the new, progressive South. To Washington and Lee, the Seminary and the Church he devoted his time, strength, and talents without reserve, and labored to the end as ever in his great Taskmaster's eye.

As I have already suggested, Browning's "Grammarians' Funeral Shortly after the Revival of Learning in Europe," might have been written of our beloved twentieth century Hellenist.

"Let us begin and carry up this corpse,
Singing together. . .
Seek we sepulture
On a tall mountain, citted to the top,
Crowded with culture. . .
Thither our path lies; wind we up the heights;
Wait ye the warning?
Our low life was the level's and the night's;
He's for the morning. . .
This is our master, famous, calm, and dead,
Borne on our shoulders. . .
He settled **Hoti's** business—let it be!—
Properly based **Oun**—
Gave us the doctrine of the enclitic **De**,
Dead from the waist down. . .
Here—here's his place, where meteors shoot, clouds form,
Lightnings are loosened, . . .
Stars come and go! . . .
Loftily lying."
Leave him—still loftier than the world suspects,
Living and dying."

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