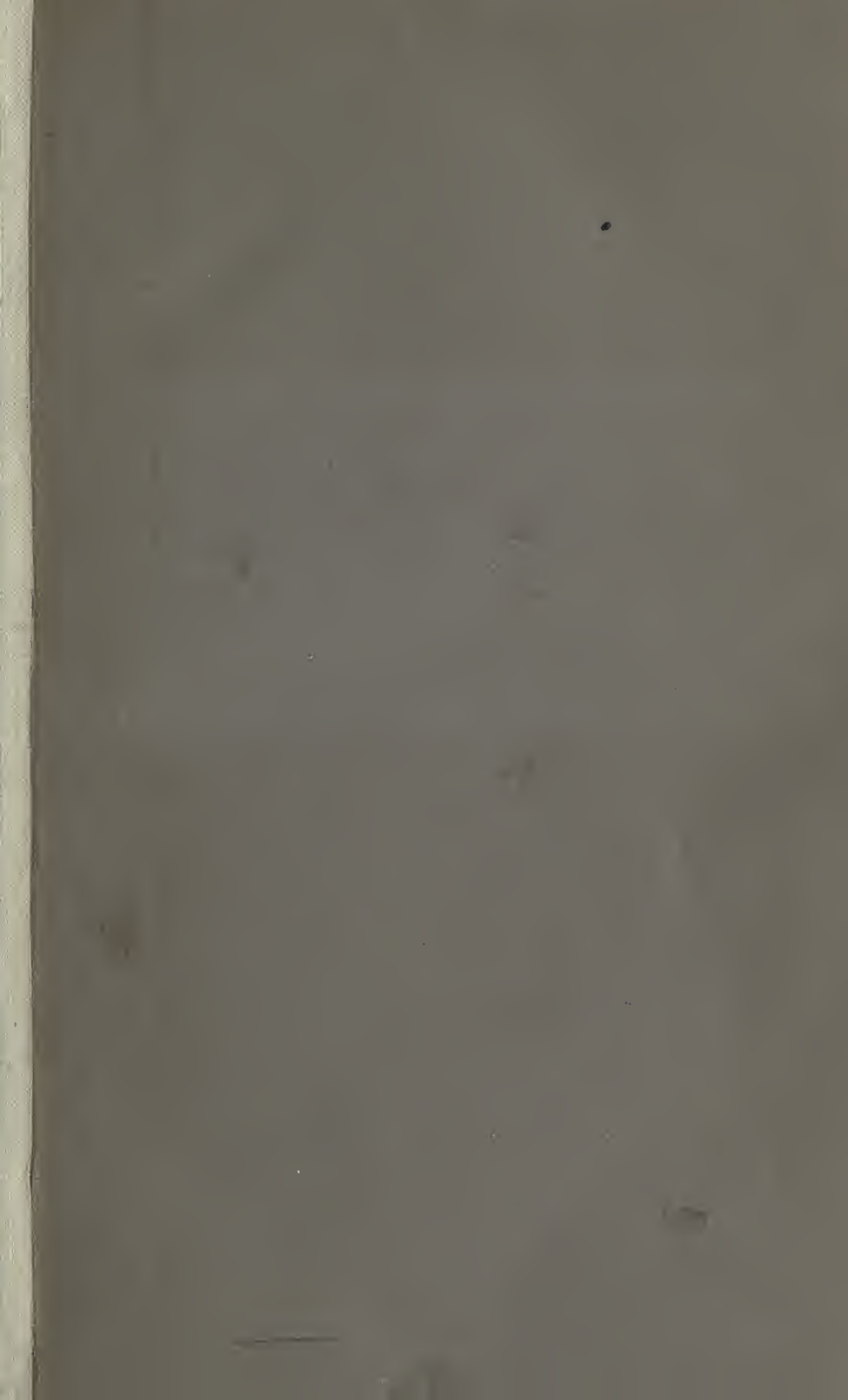


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GIFT OF

Minnesota Hist^l Society
Jan., 1855.





MEMOIR OF REV. S. Y. McMASTERS, D. D.

BY EARLE S. GOODRICH.

[Read at a meeting of the Society, Dec. 13, 1875, and ordered to be printed.]

The Rev. Dr. STERLING YANCEY McMASTERS, D. D., LL. D., whose death occurred at St. Paul, on the 5th of November, 1875, was born at Guilford Court House, North Carolina, on the 9th of December, 1813.

The family of Dr. McMASTERS was of Scotch descent. His education was completed at the University of North Carolina, whence he graduated with distinguished honors. His studies after graduation were in the line of medicine, the profession of which he intended to adopt; but his religious convictions, which had been early awakened and sedulously fostered, led him to abandon that for the more sacred calling of the ministry. His theological studies, in turn, induced a change of religious faith, from Methodism to Episcopalianism; the reason for which step he set forth in a volume entitled, "A Methodist in Search of the Church."

Of his ministerial career in his native state, we have little record, beyond the fact that his earnest character and ripe scholarship gave him reputation beyond its borders, and occasioned his call, in 1846, to the rectorship of St. Paul's Church, at Alton, Illinois. His success at Alton, was of the most gratifying character, and under his ministrations his parish became a leading one in Southern Illinois. But his scholarly repute and his zeal in educational affairs, caused his services to be demanded in other spheres of usefulness, and in 1851 he accepted a professorship in the Western Military Institute of Kentucky. The bonds of affection which united him with the people of Alton, however, were of those not easily broken; and yielding to their solicitations, he resigned his professorship at the end of a year, and returned to his

former home. Here he remained until 1858, when he removed to Palmyra, Mo., to take the presidency of St. Paul's College, located at that place.

Dr. McMASTERS was at the head of this college at the breaking out of the rebellion; but, though of Southern birth, breeding and association, his patriotism was not bounded by sectional lines, and by all the means which his profession permitted, he opposed the policy of secession. His earnestness in this respect drew upon him the hatred of the rebels of Northern Missouri, and especially of Palmyra, and he was marked for their vengeance. His life was publicly threatened, and at last his house was placed under constant surveillance. In this emergency, he received word from a friendly railroad official that, on a given night and hour, an engine would be sent to a point near the town for his rescue. Providentially the night named was dark and tempestuous, and he was able to elude his enemies and avail himself of the means of escape. Resigning the presidency of his college, he repaired to Illinois, and offered his services to the governor of that state. They were accepted, and he was appointed chaplain of the 27th Illinois Infantry. He remained in that position until his failing health compelled his resignation. The disease which caused his death was contracted while in that service, and thus his name is one more added to the long roll of those whose lives have been prematurely sacrificed at the shrine of fratricidal strife. His knowledge of medicine enabled him to be of special use during his army experience. He was, probably, as unornamental a chaplain as belonged to either army, federal or confederate; but through the sickly camps and crowded hospitals of the southwest, whither his duty called him, his medical skill and priestly presence were a boon and a benediction; and many who owe their lives to his ministrations, have wept over his death, as the loss to them of their preserver, benefactor and friend.

In 1863, Dr. McMASTERS came to Minnesota, and located at St. Paul, as rector of Christ Church. This position he retained up to the time of his death. When he located here his parish was in feeble condition, in debt, and occupying an inferior building on Cedar street, between Third and Fourth.

Under his ministrations the society rapidly grew in membership, requiring larger accommodations, and in 1866, the stone structure, corner of Fourth and Franklin streets, was completed and occupied. In addition to the onerous labor of his recorship, Dr. McMASTERS performed the functions of Registrar of the Diocese and Rural Dean, positions of trust, and placing him next in authority to the Bishop. He also represented the diocese in all the general conventions of the church that met during his residence here. For ten years he was a member of the executive council of the Minnesota Historical Society, in which institution he took a lively interest. In 1871, Governor HORACE AUSTIN appointed him to the State Normal School Board, a position he resigned in 1873, after accepting that of State Commissioner to the Vienna Exposition, for which place he left in June of that year. After performing the duties incumbent on him there, he extended his journey to the Holy Land, and remained abroad about six months. During his connection with this diocese he regularly lectured before the Divinity School at Faribault, and delivered occasional addresses upon subjects connected with education.

Dr. McMASTERS was a member of the A. S. F. and A. S. M., in which he advanced to the thirty-third degree—a degree held by but few members of the Order in Minnesota, and which was conferred upon him for distinguished services to the Order.

Dr. McMASTERS was twice married; his second wife, after long years of loving, trusting companionship, being left behind to mourn his loss. His first wife was Miss CATHARINE MONTGOMERY, a native of North Carolina, where the marriage took place in 1839. Her death followed in 1847, while her husband was in charge of the church at Alton. By this marriage four children were born, only two of whom are now living—a daughter, the wife of Chief Justice GILFILLAN, and a son, Dr. JAMES MONTGOMERY McMASTERS, now practicing his profession at Sauk Centre, in this State. In 1848 Dr. McMASTERS married for his second wife Miss JULIA RUSSELL BOWERS, of Alton, Ill. Two children were born of this mar-

riage—STERLING RUSSELL McMASTERS, residing at St. Paul, and a daughter who died in infancy.

Such is a brief sketch of the uneventful incidents in the life of one who consecrated great powers to the performance of simple duties. With every competency of intellect and learning and moral worth, he was unambitious, seeking no preferment in his church, but modestly willing to work in the place whereunto he was called. But, fortunately, great men do not need the aids of high official position to make their greatness felt; for the forces of intellect, like those of nature, however silently and unobtrusively they may work, assert their supremacy and compel recognition. So this man, clothed with the humility, and joyfully content to perform the meanest ministries, of his sacred calling, was not only known throughout his communion as a profound theologian, but was also recognized by the skilled and wise, of this and other countries, as learned in many branches of natural history, and as competent, had he so engaged himself, to take rank among the specialists in these subjects of scientific research. Yet, in these subjects, outside of the profession to which he devoted his life, however successful his investigations, he manifested little pride. They were not the prime, but only the incidental objects of his thought and study. He did not seek knowledge for vainglorious display, for the general public knew little of his profound erudition. Nor was it for the mere gratification of a craving desire for learning, which, with so many scholars, debases the most liberal of pursuits into a selfish miserly greed. But he was deeply impressed with the dignity and importance of the vast subjects which his profession required him to elucidate, and he sought from all learning within his reach whatever could give him clearer light, or enable him to transmit a clearer light to others. His piety gave wings to his intellect; and so, in sermons, and books, and common talk, the great theme, which was the substance and soul of all, was illustrated and adorned by the learning of all sciences, and arts, and lands.

The intellect of Dr. McMASTERS was characterized by remarkable clearness of conception and rapidity of movement. His mental eye had that eagle vision which takes in large ex-

panses at a glance, yet in the glance discerns the smallest objects. This quality enabled him to compass a great amount and variety of reading without trespassing upon the time which belonged to the duties of his profession. Joined to a faculty of assimilation quite as remarkable, the acquisition of knowledge with him seemed to come by intuition rather than by labor—an act which the vulgar call genius, but which is the result, simply, of clearer and more rapid mental insight and digestion than is common to the mass of men. But this very clearness and rapidity were, in some respects, an injury to him. It made composition a labor always irksome, and sometimes almost impossible. His ideas outran his pen; and while he has left behind him much to indicate the range and strength, there is little to reveal the graces, of his culture. A book or two, logical and comprehensive, but studiously un-rhetorical; a few pamphlets; some scientific monographs; an occasional sermon; these are all the finished productions which remain of a man whose learning was so various and so profound. Of all the sermons preached during nearly forty years of ministerial labor, but few were fully written; the mass remain only as skeletons, showing the line of argument with an occasional illustrative hint. The writer of this sketch, often charmed and delighted by sermons which, as delivered, seemed in their strength and passion, and wealth of illustration, to be almost inspired, has never found on reading the manuscripts, more than the barest outline of argument. The graces of rhetoric, the moving earnestness of appeal, the apposite illustrations drawn from all sources of literature and of life—these were the extemporaneous decoration, by the artist in the pulpit, of the skeleton which lay in manuscript before him on his desk. In appearance he adhered to the custom of reading prepared sermons, common to his church; and no one, unaware of his habit, would imagine that, as a rule, more than half the spoken sermon was extemporaneous; while his readiness was so remarkable, that those who knew his custom would fail to distinguish between the portions written and unwritten. The *vrai-semblance* was complete.

Two qualities of mind and nature, logic and humor, will

always be associated with Dr. McMASTERS in the memory of those who knew him. The logic came to him legitimately, through his Scotch parentage; the humor was his in spite of it. This logical faculty he possessed in an uncommon degree. Admitting his premises, there was no gainsaying his conclusions. His arguments were so clear, connected and complete, that, in dispute, the only way to escape defeat was to dissent from his first proposition. If you ventured to accompany him a part of the way, he carried you along, perforce, by his own route, to the journey's end. This logical faculty, coupled with the habit, which grows out of it, of seizing hold of the vital points of questions, gave him not only great power in the pulpit, but gained him a large influence in the local and general conventions of his church. It was the remark of an eminent New York divine, that he was always glad to see Dr. McMASTERS rise in general convention to discuss a knotty question, for his Scotch way of putting things was sure to end the controversy. His humor was the spontaneous outgrowth of a genial, cheerful nature. It oiled the joints of his mind, made him the most delightful of companions, and enabled him to be a learned man without at the same time being a pedant. His fund of mirthful stories was inexhaustible; and he delighted to illustrate profound truths, or expose offensive shams, by apposite anecdotes appreciatingly told.

In person, Dr. McMASTERS was of medium height, of a compact frame strongly knit together, of an habitually thoughtful mein, with a countenance that, while genial and kind, was marked by the rugged lines belonging to the race from which he sprang. His head was nobly molded and posed, his features regular, and his eyes remarkably brilliant, changeful and expressive. He was careless of appearances, never conspicuously advertising by his dress the character of his profession. He held religion to be a practical business, and that its teacher should be a practical man; and he so attired and carried himself that the roughest laborer, whose hand he cordially grasped, never thought of querying whether there were, or ought to be, two separate heavens—one for the prinking priest and another for the poor parishioner. There was nothing in common between him and the

Rev. CREAM CHEESE; the school of divinity in which he was bred did not employ the system of hot-house culture, and produce tender plants, useless in the pulpit, and fit only for the sewing circle and the drawing room. He impressed one as a manly man, frank, robust, strong, and thoroughly capable—giving rise to no perplexing doubts whether the hand of the Almighty, or a clerical tailor, had fashioned him.

It is a fancy we often indulge when contemplating the elements of a strong character, to imagine the manner of man which might have been wrought out under the influence of other circumstances, and in different spheres of action. Applying this to the subject of our sketch, we can easily see that the clear and logical qualities of his mind, united with his habitual industry, might have made of him a great scientist, or jurist, or statesman. We cannot conceive, however, that he could ever have been a successful politician. He was too sturdy and honest and uncompromising for that. He could not “crook the pregnant hinges of the knee that thrift might follow fawning.” His hatred of all duplicity and shams was in its intensity almost unclerical. And especially so, of the solemn shams. And most especially so, of the shams which intruded themselves into his own communion. The mummeries which many of the younger and weaker of the clergy practice as props to a piety not strong enough to stand on its own legs, excited his utter, if not always his outspoken, disgust.

But it is superfluous to speculate on what might have been, when the life under review combined so much that was fair and lovely and of good report. It is doubtful, after all, if any profession or pursuit yields to its votary a more gratifying compensation than comes to the faithful minister of CHRIST. Certainly none other compares with it in all the essentials of high dignity. The Ambassador of GOD to Man! there is no other human title so august; no merely human interests so vast as those confided to his care; for they comprise all that is dearest here with all that is most dreaded or desired hereafter. Apart from its dignities, there is in the performance of its lowest offices the reward that follows the comfortable consciousness of doing good. The clergyman habitually comes

in contact with men under circumstances that reveal the better qualities of their character ; and though he may not shrink from scenes of suffering and vice, yet, as a rule, human nature shows him its fairest side. It is his privilege as well as his duty to minister at the altar and the grave, where the brightest hopes of life are born and lie buried ; to bring cheer to the chamber of sickness, and consolation to the house of sorrow ; to so clothe counsel with wisdom that it command assent, and yet so temper it with modesty that it do not give offense ; to praise so discreetly that it shall not engender pride, and admonish so gently that it shall leave no sting ; and, however skilled he may be in the learning of the schools, to show that he far excels in that better knowledge of the heart which cultivates the sympathies and affections, and binds all men together in the bonds of a charity which "suffereth long, and is kind."

These, and all the duties of his sacred office, were performed by Dr. McMASTERS with a full sense of the solemn responsibility resting upon him. For years, however, under the weakening effect of an insidious disease, these duties tasked his body beyond its powers. Yet few of those who saw him going about doing good, knew that his sufferings were greater than the afflictions of those to whom he ministered. But the stern will was superior to bodily infirmity, and there were no signs in the cheerful smile and cordial manner which sprang from the tender heart of the loving pastor, of the disease which racked his body and agonized his brain. In this way the last five years of the good doctor's life were years of such sacrifice as few men are compelled or permitted to live ; and they revealed that rarest heroism which sinks self in duty, and out of the ills and sufferings of life brings patience and cheer, and all the gentle ministries of charity and love.

At last his disease produced a suffering so continuous and acute, that a council of physicians decided upon a dangerous operation as affording the only hope of prolonging his life, or rendering it endurable. This, though skillfully performed, did not avail, for years of suffering had too far reduced his strength, and he survived the torturing surgery for a few days only. But these few days were mercifully passed, for the greater part, in happy unconsciousness of the agony which

closed a life that, far too short, was long enough extended to develop every strong and generous quality of mind and heart, and to present us a grandly modeled character, fully rounded, finished and complete.

SAINT PAUL, Dec. 11, 1875.

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