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August 30, 1893

A book review of Levensschets van Rev. A. C. Van Raalte, D.D., uit oorspronkelyke bronnen bewerkt, door Rev. Henry E. Dosker, (Nykerk, 1893), which was published in The Christian Intelligencer, p. (689) 5.

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erman, begun when they had been messmates at the University of Franeker, was resumed at this Synod. Breitinger became so influential in its deliberations that he was honored with the appointment on the committee to draw up the canons of the Synod. And here there is a fact to be noticed. His influence in that committee seems to have been very great. For it is noticeable that the Canons which the committee produced follow very closely the very abhorisms that Breitinger had brought before the Conference at Aaran, before the Synod met at Dort. So that the Canons of Dort might almost be said to be Swiss in form, although redacted by the Dutch. And when the Canons were adopted by the Synod, Breitinger declared that it was the happiest day of his life.

One of the most significant events that took place at the Synod was the celebration of the centenary of the Reformation on January 1st, 1619. To it Breitinger invited the deputies of the States-General of Holland and Bogerman, the President of the Synod, and the English Bishop of Llandaff, with many others. A number of addresses were made by them on the occasion. Another event which shows the peculiar honor done to him was at the sad death of Breitinger's young companion, Stapfer. Although the young man was not a member of the Synod, yet the Synod adjourned to his funeral and followed his body to the grave out of respect to Breitinger. Thus Breitinger was honored by the Synod, and was influential in its sessions.

Having fulfilled his duties at the Synod Breitinger, after its adjournment, started homeward. And when he came to the borders of his own native Canton of Zurich, he was surprised to find how the people came out to honor him who had brought so much honor on them at the Synod. His return is said to have been very much like a triumphal entry. This interesting episode in Dutch history reveals the essential unity of the two Churches at that time. May their descendants in this country cultivate that unity.

A Biography of Dr. Van Raalte.*

BY THE REV. DANIEL VAN PREL.

THIS is a strong, a well-written book, extremely interesting and instructive. While reading it we could not but regret that it was not written in English, for we are sure many of the brethren in the East would be glad to become acquainted with its contents, especially those who have personal recollections of Dr. Van Raalte. Mr. Dosker has succeeded in producing an excellent biography. Though he could not avoid being eulogistic, the book is not a mere eulogy; for while thoroughly in sympathy with his subject, he is not blind to his faults and mistakes. Throughout the sketch we obtain and retain a clear, distinct, intelligently apprehended and consistently delineated portrait of the man whose career is under review. We begin to get an understanding of Van Raalte's character in the account of his separation from the mother Church; and while a calm and impartial perusal of the "Officiële Stukken,"—(which are documents prepared by various leaders of the Separation of 1834-35, giving accounts of the causes that severally led them to take the step)—creates the impression that the others were not altogether free from pettiness of action on occasion, Van Raalte's action was eminently dignified and well-founded.

Our esteem of the man grows as Mr. Dosker proceeds with his story, showing him as the promoter and leader of the emigration of 1846-47; as the soul and the life of the colony in Michigan, without whose indomitable spirit and perseverance amid every form of trial and discouragement it would have been nipped in the very bud; as the faithful and edifying preacher and ecclesiastical statesman, seeing farther ahead than those surrounding him. The tone of the book becomes here, perhaps, somewhat too continuously apologetic or polemic, if the latter be not too strong a term. There is in the treatment of almost every phase of the topic in its American development a reference and an anticipatory answer to possible objections. But then the writer (and the Western reader) knows well enough that these objections are more than possible, they are, or have been actual; they are or have been really advanced against the various acts or policies described. Hence this feature of the book cannot be regarded as a detriment; it belongs inevitably to the matter in hand, and becomes rather a merit as this treatment with living issues in mind enables Mr. Dosker to set his subject before us vividly, and so that we shall the better appreciate the man and his times. The disputatious Hollander, too, will

read the book with all the greater relish for this, whether it defends or attacks his own positions.

The life story here related should be a lesson and an inspiration to our Holland branch of the Church in the West. What is best, wisest, most progressive, most Americanizing, among these congregations of a foreign birth, was laid within them by the wise words and broad ideas and intelligent and far reaching acts of Dr. Van Raalte. His biographer says: "Whatever Van Raalte may have had in mind while in the Netherlands—the idea of founding a little Holland in America never possessed him. I say this unhesitatingly, without fear of contradiction." And, therefore, Mr. Dosker makes this eloquent appeal to his Western brethren to hold the man in precious remembrance: "From the depths of my heart I say to all who knew and loved Van Raalte, keep what you have of him in memory. Your honoring of him is to your honor; your love is your glory. Next to God you owe much more than you yourselves know to the man with clear eye and brave heart, whom you rightly call, the Father of this Colony."

Yet we are constrained to smile a little at the excessive but natural enthusiasm which makes the biographer discover qualities of a Napoleonic order endowing the modest country pastor with absolute greatness. Of course the provincial surroundings and education of the writer tend to exaggerate activities exerted on a strictly provincial scale, both here and in the mother country; for surely the needs of such a population as Van Raalte led were very obvious; what would tend to their highest present and prospective good as citizens and Christians in this Republic was readily discernible to any man of keen intelligence who had spent his life among them. But, besides, the writer has come to his subject deeply possessed with an abounding affection and admiration as the legacy of childhood-days, intensified by a close study of the man in the very midst of the excellent fruits of his wisdom and foresight. And remembering this, we shall not quarrel with the extravagant estimate of Dr. Van Raalte by his biographer.

A just appreciation of him will still place him high in our esteem, as we consider how well,—how unselfishly, painstakingly, heroically,—he did the task assigned to him in his necessarily limited circle; as we recall to mind the sturdy, honest, admirable personality of the man himself; and especially as we contemplate the important, nay, inestimable, service he unconsciously came to render our denomination at the precise juncture he appeared upon the scene.

And finally, we are compelled to call attention to one important (shall we say, timely,) lesson to be derived from the perusal of the pages of this book. It is the lesson of the growing, the self-propagating evil of secession. Once let loose that principle, and who is going to tell where it will end? The secession in Holland of 1834 was led by about four or five young men, none of whom had been longer than two years in the ministry. They saw grounds for seceding from the Reformed Church, (National,) which did not appear sufficient to such lights as Cappadocia, Da Costa, Bilderdyk and Groen van Prinsteren, who sympathized with them perfectly on doctrinal questions.

De Cocq, in Friesland, was the first to make a break; he was gallantly seconded by Scholte when it meant imprisonment and deposition for the latter to do so. Then he also seceded. With in a few years De Cocq had excommunicated and deposed Scholte. Thus Scholte led another secession. Next there rose opposition to Van Raalte; a section of his own congregation denounced him as heterodox; and his brother-in-law (Van Velzen, another of the clerical leaders,) felt so bitterly towards him that in a published document he cannot even mention him by name, but refers to him as "a clergyman." Ten years after the seceding colony has settled in America, there is (in 1857) another secession, because of the union with our denomination, which was declared impure of doctrine. Since that time we are told there have been five or six secessions in the city of Grand Rapids, Mich., alone, the latest, purest, most sublimated Church being ministered to by an enlightened (or illuminated) blacksmith. Thus the evil when once started—like a veritable cancer—seems bound to grow and eat its way into the very vitals of the Church of God. After that of 1857, we of later days have witnessed the secession on account of Free-Masonry; and there were more than rumblings of a threatened break if certain legislation had been put through at the last General Synod of our Church. At least the vote against that legislation in the Classes was largely influenced by such threats. The lesson, then, to be derived from Mr. Dosker's book is

indeed a useful and a timely one. It had better be accepted as a warning.

George Giffillan.

BY THE REV. D. SUTHERLAND.

FOURTEEN years ago, in the busy city of Dundee, there died a Scotch preacher, whose death was a personal sorrow to hundreds who never saw his face or heard his voice, and a distinct loss to literature. The preacher's name was George Giffillan. Into his life he crowded an amount of work and a variety of endeavor so exhausting as to wear out his strength. The story of what he did is at last told in a biography adequate in knowledge and capable in treatment, a biography which will help worthily to perpetuate the memory and influence of a man of genius in whom bigness of brain was even less prominent than bigness of heart.

George Giffillan was born and brought up in that nursery of talent, a Scottish manse. His father belonged to the small but vigorous branch of Presbyterianism known as the Anti-Burghers, and immortalized of late by the pen of J. M. Barrie. His mother was a woman of pious heart, healthy disposition and strong common sense. The worthy couple began housekeeping on £250 a year, had twelve children, eight of whom lived to grow up, and their annual income never reached five hundred dollars. The living was plain, but the thinking was high in the manse, and the environment was such as to build up a manhood well developed, physically, mentally and spiritually.

George was an omnivorous reader, a daring thinker and an impetuous exponent of his views from boyhood. He early sounded the depths of doubt, and so gained an experience which enlarged his charity and strengthened his helpfulness for the perplexed when the time came for him to be a teacher of men. His choice of a life-work was the ministry of the Gospel, and to that choice he adhered in the teeth of temptations before which many would have succumbed. There can be no doubt that his religious convictions and his position as a Presbyterian minister stood between him and the full recognition of his extraordinary literary gifts, but he never wavered in his fidelity to the vow he took on the day of his ordination. His first and best service was ever given to his own people, who loved him with an affection time has been powerless to touch. The warmth of his heart, as well as the ability of his pulpit and platform activity, won for him a unique place in the city where his ministerial life was spent. "Our George," Dundee called him, and that familiar title spoke of respectful admiration as much as of the proud possession of love.

Giffillan's greatest work was his long and splendid advocacy of the union of religion and literature. He repudiated with all the energy of his fiery nature the divorce of what he believed God had joined together. Because of this he was looked upon with suspicion by some of his brethren, whose thoughts and outlook were narrow in their range. Thirty years ago most Presbyterian ministers in Scotland hesitated to enter and claim for Christ the larger world of thought opened by literature. It is different now, and much of the difference is due to the eloquent and powerful championship of Giffillan. He taught the truth that everything good and noble and helpful in the ideas of the age ought to be linked to religious faith as its natural ally. The breadth of his views and the foresight of his vision led him to speak ahead of the conceptions of his day—a prophetic function for which he paid a prophet's penalty. "Now," as a competent critic of the man and his work well said, "the sayings for which he was tormented are the common-places of every influential pulpit in Scotland."

Giffillan's preaching was characteristic of the man—impetuous, affectionate, daring, and aglow with splendid imagery. For young men he had a special charm. Many testify that to him they owe their souls. Often he said what we could not endorse, but he never said a thing that did not come straight from his heart, and that did not go straight to the hearts of his hearers. His manner in the pulpit was singularly unconventional. Once he preached for Dr. Joseph Parker, then minister of a large congregation in Manchester, now the famous pastor of the City Temple, London, and that divine declares he never can forget the sermon or how it was delivered. The preacher took the sermon out of his trouser-pocket and laid it in little heaps of paper, far from clean, on the pulpit Bible, taking up slip by slip to be read at the pulpit lamp as if he were announcing a bazaar or a tea-meeting! But oddities of manner and speech were speedily forgotten in an interest which intensi-

* Lovensachets van Rev. A. C. Van Raalte, D.D., uit oorspronkelijke bronnen bewerkt, door Rev. Henry E. Dosker, Nijkerk, 1893. [A Sketch of the Life of Rev. A. C. Van Raalte, D.D., from original sources, by Rev. Henry E. Dosker.]

review of Parker's life
of Van Rastie by
Rev. Daniel Van Riet,
Chun Intelligence

Aug 30, 1873

lamented it was published in Dutch
"too continuously apologetic
or polemical," ...

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sentiment is echoed by Eugene Bianchi, a former Jesuit who is now a professor at Emory University. A New York Catholic priest has written a book called *The Coming Convergence of World Religions*.

The Churches Only Ultimate Defense

Sociologically speaking, the present polarization in the churches is between a relatively conservative lay membership and older clergy on the one hand, and some laymen along with the majority of younger clergy on the other. The latter group, in terms of background and education, has been heavily influenced by the enlightened culture. Enlightened religion is most noticeable among students and professors in universities and seminaries (which now exist in the shadow of great universities and emulate them), recent graduates of these institutions, and bureaucrats in national church offices. These persons protest that they have more in common with enlightened individuals outside the churches than with unenlightened fellow church

members, and the church leaders among them look to the enlightened culture for guiding signals. Conservative lay people suspect, often with cause, that they are being manipulated by the leadership to serve the enlightened consensus.

The present triumph of progressivism in the churches is in part justified, since it is a reaction to their often willful narrowness of the past, to their refusal to recognize the necessary social dimensions of Christian belief, and to their obvious co-option by the older American consensus now in such disarray.

The tragedy of the churches is that the lessons of the past have not been adequately learned and that many church leaders seem ready to exchange one form of secular co-option for another. The churches' only ultimate defense is a strong, continuing affirmation of the transcendental character of religion and an unyielding insistence on the absolute centrality of specifically religious values in the life of the believer. For the foreseeable future, however, the trends in American Christianity will be moving mainly in the opposite direction.

Prepackaged Religion