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“THE FIRST RELIGIOUS NEWSPAPER.”

BY LOUIS F. BENSON, D. D.

In the historic graveyard of the Third (or old Pine Street) Presbyterian Church, at Fourth and Pine Streets, Philadelphia, there stands a modest headstone bearing on its face these words:

SACRED
TO
the memory of the
REV. JOHN WELWOOD SCOTT.
Who departed this life
March 3^d 1842,
in the 65th year of his age.
He was a sound divine, and was
the establisher of the first Religious
Newspaper ever published.

Being dead, he yet speaketh by his
living example of piety and his
numerous poetical and theological
writings.

ALSO
JANE,
HIS WIFE.
Who departed this life
May 30, 1855
in the 74th year of her age.
*Blessed are the dead who
die in the Lord.*

John Welwood Scott in early life was a printer, with a bent toward scholarship and literature. He was a communicant member of the Third Church, and on December 21,

DAVID STEELE, JUNIOR:
1826-1906

BY ROBERT HUNTER, D. D.

The Rev. David Steele, Jr., D. D., LL. D., was born October 20th, 1826, at Altaghaderry, near the historic city of Londonderry, Ireland. He was a lineal descendant of Captain John Steele of Lanarkshire, Scotland, who was a leader among the Covenanters of that district, and fought at the battle of Drumclog. David Steele, one of the martyrs of the Covenant referred to in Sir Walter Scott's *Chronicles of the Canon-gate*, was a cousin of this Captain John Steele. His mother was Eleanor Fulton of Gortanleave, Co. Donegal, Ireland, a relative of the famous Robert Fulton, the inventor of the application of steam to navigation. Dr. Steele was only two years of age when his mother passed away from earth. Some time afterwards he came under the care and training of a godly stepmother, Jane Osborne, who in later years often took occasion to speak of his filial kindness and devotion to her.

His early life was spent upon the farm of his father, James Steele, who was a respected ruling elder in the Covenanter Church, at Waterside, Londonderry. His early education began in a classical academy in Londonderry, where he had for his playground the old walls which have associated with them the memories of the heroic defense of 1688. In his home life he breathed the atmosphere of piety and affection. Family worship was maintained daily, morning and evening, and social prayer-meetings for the Covenanters from the neighborhood were held from time to time. The Sabbath was observed strictly, and days of fasting and thanksgiving were observed every year as strictly as the Sabbath. At fourteen years of age, not having as yet definitely decided as to his calling in life, he revealed considerable skill in agricultural pursuits. He developed special aptitude in the use of the plough. Ability in this direction, being the ambition of many of the farmers' sons of the neighborhood, ploughing matches were

held from time to time. As a witness to his skill, he obtained as prizes, two beautiful silver cups, which even in his latest years he exhibited with commendable pride. During the days of his life on the farm his studies were to a considerable extent kept up, his store of knowledge increased, and his powers developed by systematic and extensive reading. He continued his life on the farm until he was twenty-seven years of age, when he finally decided to give himself to the ministry. At this time he was in possession of one of the best farms in the neighborhood, the gift of his father, and had every prospect of success and material prosperity.

He was seventeen years old, when he made a public profession of his faith in Jesus Christ, and entered upon the responsibilities of Church membership. Among the Covenanters a newly received male member of the Church was expected to conduct the devotions at the next neighborhood prayer-meeting—to “take the books,” as it was termed. About the same time he became deeply interested in Sabbath School work, serving for a time as a teacher and subsequently as superintendent. As a young man he took deep interest in the controversy which agitated the Reformed Presbyterian Church in Ireland respecting civil affairs. Hitherto all Covenanters held to the view that they were not warranted in taking an active part in civil affairs, because Jesus Christ was not recognized as He should be as the King and Head of the nation. In this controversy the Rev. Dr. John Paul and the Rev. Thomas Huston were the representatives respectively of the new view and of the old conservative position. Dr. Paul by his powerful and incisive argument made a deep impression upon Dr. Steele’s mind, and he ever afterwards took his stand on the side of liberty of conscience; holding to the position that the question of civil duty should be left to the individual conscience and be no longer a subject for Church discipline.

In 1853 the Rev. Dr. David Steele, Sr., an uncle of Dr. Steele, then residing in Adams Co., Ohio, and one of the foremost exponents of the Covenanters’ faith in the United States, visited Ireland, the result of which was that there was awakened in the mind of the nephew an intense longing to enter

the ministry. His decision involved no little struggle with self, only made the harder because of the manifested disappointment of a fond father who had expected that his son was to settle down to a comfortable and prosperous agricultural life close to the old home. But the noble purpose of the young man triumphed; and that he was divinely guided as to his future work, his subsequent career gives ample evidence.

Having arranged his affairs in the land of his birth, he sailed for America, arriving in Philadelphia, October 1, 1853. He spent his first Sabbath in Philadelphia, worshiping in the First Reformed Presbyterian Church (O. S.), located on 17th Street above Race Street, of which the Rev. Dr. S. O. Wylie was pastor. Shortly afterwards, he went to Adams Co., Ohio, and made his home with his uncle, Rev. David Steele, Sr., who had been instrumental in bringing him to a decision to study for the ministry. Under his uncle's tuition, who was a proficient classical scholar, he made his final preparation for college, entering the Junior class in Miami University, Oxford, Ohio, from which he graduated in 1857, taking the classical honors in a graduating class which numbered thirty-six. Chancellor Henry M. McCracken of the New York University and Dr. John S. Billings, Librarian of the New York Public Library, were among his classmates, and the Hon. Whitelaw Reid was a student in the college at that time, though not a classmate.

Immediately after graduating he taught during parts of the years 1857-58, in the Cynthiana Academy in Harrison Co., Kentucky. During a portion of the year 1858 he also occupied the Chair of Greek in his Alma Mater in the absence of Professor Elliott; at the same time he had charge of an elective class in Hebrew.

He entered upon the formal study of theology in 1859 in the Theological Seminary of the Reformed Presbyterian Church (General Synod) in Philadelphia, having for his preceptors the Rev. Dr. John Neill McLeod and the Rev. Dr. Theodore W. J. Wylie. Theology was no new field for him when he entered the seminary. He had been a diligent student and lover of this sacred science from his boyhood days. Indeed, the atmosphere of his father's home, the kind of

preaching to which he had been accustomed to listen in the home church, and his conversations with his uncle, while preparing for college, had made him a trained theologian before he began his course in the Theological Seminary.

He was licensed to preach the gospel by the Reformed Presbytery of Philadelphia in March, 1860. He graduated from the Theological Seminary in March, 1861. Shortly after he completed his theological course he was invited to become pastor of the Fifteenth Presbyterian Church in Philadelphia, then located at 15th and Lombard Streets. This he declined, owing to his unwillingness to leave the Reformed Presbyterian Church; about the same time he also received calls from the Reformed Presbyterian congregation at Cedarville, Ohio, the Third Reformed Presbyterian Church of Philadelphia, and the Reformed Presbyterian Church in Belfast, Ireland. These invitations he declined, in order that he might accept a call from a new organization in Philadelphia consisting of 89 members, most of whom had withdrawn from the Fifteenth Presbyterian Church, and were worshipping in Kater Hall on South Street above Fifteenth Street. He was ordained and installed pastor of this new congregation, then known as the Sixth Reformed Presbyterian Church, in May, 1861. In November, 1862, this church consolidated with the Fourth Reformed Presbyterian Church, then located at 18th and Filbert Streets, and Dr. Steele became pastor of the consolidated church under the name of the Fourth Reformed Presbyterian Church. The congregation, in October, 1890, moved to a new edifice at the corner of 19th and Catherine Streets, where Dr. Steele continued his efficient and successful ministry until his death, which occurred on Friday, June 15, 1906. When Dr. Steele became pastor of the united church in 1862, the membership numbered 289; when he closed his ministry there were upwards of 600 on the roll of communicants.

Dr. Steele was a man of commanding presence and dignified manner, whether in the pulpit or in the social circle. He was a preacher of a high order. His sermons were carefully written but delivered without the use of the manuscript. He had a choice vocabulary and was very orderly in his arrange-

ment of his matter, adhering closely to the homiletic method of clearly indicated heads and sub-divisions. His sermon might be characterized as a combination of the doctrinal and expository mode of the treatment of divine truth. No intelligent hearer could sit under his ministry for a number of years without getting a deep insight into the Holy Scriptures and, for that matter, without having acquired a good knowledge of the Calvinistic system. He had a rich musical voice, which he knew well how to modulate, and which was pleasant to hear. He articulated clearly, so that not a word was lost to the hearer. Whether in the pulpit or on the platform, he exhibited superior oratorical ability, which always commanded attention and produced a deep impression. He was a sympathetic and systematic pastor. Once a year at least he visited all the homes of his people, announcing on the previous Sabbath the families or persons to be visited during the week. He was generally accompanied in the visitations by one of the ruling elders. Diligent inquiry was made at every home as to the spiritual condition, as well as to their general welfare, the children were catechized, and those who were of sufficient knowledge were urged to confess Christ, and become communicant members of the church. To this care of the young in the home and in the Sabbath School, doubtless, may be traced the fact that twelve of the sons of the church became ministers of the Gospel during his pastorate. But besides this formally announced visitation, he was faithful in his attendance upon the sick, the bereaved, and the sorrowing. His ministrations at such times were peculiarly tender, refreshing and comforting. In a word he was a superior preacher, and an ideal under-shepherd. He was also faithful and punctual as a presbyter, and he might be well described as a "high-church" Presbyterian. He sincerely subscribed to that statement in "Reformation Principles," which declares, "The Lord Jesus Christ the Alone King and Head of the Church has appointed one permanent form of church government, and that form is by divine right Presbyterian." He was recognized by those of his own denomination as one of the chief exponents of its distinctive principles, and his views carried great weight in the

discussions of all matters of importance which came up for review and settlement in the Presbytery and General Synod. That his ability and influence were recognized is evidenced in that he was stated clerk of the General Synod from 1874 to 1886, and twice Moderator of that body, in 1868 and 1886.

About the same time that he was ordained and installed as pastor, he received a temporary appointment to teach Hebrew in the Theological Seminary, and in 1863 he was chosen by the General Synod to a full professorship to teach Hebrew, Greek and pastoral theology. In 1875, after the death of Rev. Dr. John Neill McLeod, who had been his teacher in systematic theology, and his colleague in the seminary for twelve years, he was transferred to that chair, which position he held, together with that of Dean of the Faculty, until his death.

The degree of Doctor of Divinity was conferred upon him by Rutgers College in 1866, and the degree of Doctor of Laws by Miami University in 1903.

Dr. Steele's prominence in his own denomination led to his appointment to represent it in various capacities in relation to other denominations, and in conference and coöperation in the work of the Church at large. He was on three occasions a member of the Pan-Presbyterian Council: in 1880, in Philadelphia; in 1884, in Belfast; and 1896, in Glasgow. In the Philadelphia meeting he read a paper on "Personal Religion," and at the Glasgow he read a paper on "The Reading of the Scriptures." He was also a member of the Inter-Church Conference held in New York, in 1906. He was delighted with the closer relations of the churches represented in the Alliance, through the agency of federation. He believed in the essential unity of the different parts of the true Church of Christ, and sincerely and earnestly prayed that they all might be made manifestly one. Although in the earlier years of his ministry he did not believe that the conditions then existing warranted the organic union of his own denomination with any of the branches of the Presbyterian family, in his later years he became thoroughly convinced and openly committed to union with the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America, on what he considered

a fair and comprehensive basis, proposed at a joint committee on Church Unity, in which he represented the General Synod of the Reformed Presbyterian Church. He was much disappointed when the General Synod, in May, 1904, rejected this basis of union by a very small majority. At the time when he was called from his labors, he was entertaining the hope, and awaiting the realization of his congregation and himself becoming a part of the General Assembly; while retaining the right under the proposed basis of union of adhering, if they so chose, to the principles and usages to which they and their fathers had been accustomed.

Dr. Steele always took a deep interest in social and philanthropic movements. He was a member of the Christian Commission during the Civil War and spent considerable time at the front, ministering to the needs of the soldiers. He welcomed the Christian Endeavor movement, and held a position on one of the important committees of the Philadelphia Union. He was a member of the Scotch-Irish Society, the Archaeological Association of the University of Pennsylvania, the Law and Order Society, the Christian League, the Pennsylvania Bible Society, and several other organizations more or less closely related to the mission and work of the Church.

He was since 1863 a member of The Presbyterian Historical Society, and for years a member of its Council. He was punctual in attendance, and his counsel and coöperation were very valuable. He read a paper of great interest before the Society, entitled "History of the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America," and printed in the JOURNAL.

Dr. Steele died after a brief illness, at his home in Philadelphia, June 15th, 1906. Funeral services were held in his church at 19th and Catharine Streets, in which the Rev. Drs. Henry C. McCook, Wm. H. Roberts, John H. Kendell, and Robert Hunter participated. His remains were laid to rest in West Laurel Hill Cemetery.

Those who knew Dr. Steele best, and who observed the integrity and purity of his life, could not help being frequently reminded of the Saviour's words, "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God."