

IN MEMORIAM

By JOHN T. McNEILL

GEORGE WARREN RICHARDS
1869-1955

George Warren Richards, who died June 11, 1955, lived a long and exceptionally active life in which the practical churchman was perhaps better known than the historian. Descended from a German family with both Reformed and Lutheran connections, he spent three years in the Lutheran Muhlenberg College, Allentown, Pennsylvania, but finished his course at Franklin and Marshall College, Lancaster. Graduating there in 1887, he went on to the adjacent Reformed Theological Seminary where he completed his theological training in 1890. He then entered on the pastoral ministry at Allentown. By 1898, when the professorship of Church History in the Lancaster Seminary was vacant, he was elected by his church to this post. He had already won distinction as a writer for religious periodicals, producing articles that exhibited his high talent for historical subject. Studies in Berlin and Erlangen helped him to prepare for his teaching in the seminary, which began in October 1899 and continued for forty years. In 1921 he became President of the school, and he served with distinction in this office until his retirement in 1939. For many years he was an active member of the American Society of Church History. His papers before the Society were mainly on phases of the Mercersburg theology, of which he was an early and well informed interpreter. The first of these was delivered in the meeting of 1910. After years of experience in the work of the Ecumenical Movement he returned with fresh appreciation to this theme, as his articles in *Church History* IX (1940) and XX (1951) attest. His interest in Barth and Barthianism is reflected in his article, "Was Troeltsch Right?" (III, 1933), and especially in his book, *Beyond Fundamentalism and*

Modernism (1934). His other books include *Studies in the Heidelberg Catechism* (1913) and *Creative Controversies in Christianity* (1938). He also translated a number of books by Barth, with whom he was on friendly terms. Theologically his relation to Barth was that of an admirer, but not of a disciple. A number of his articles published in *The Reformed Church Review* were of historical content.

Dr. Richards included in his many activities extraordinary services to the Ecumenical Movement. He made, in all, seventeen trips to Europe. He was President of The World Alliance of Reformed Churches (1933), and participated in the historic ecumenical meetings of Stockholm, Lausanne, Edinburgh, and Oxford. He may be said to have led his denomination in its union with the Evangelical Synod of North America, and he was appropriately chosen as the first President of the Evangelical and Reformed Church (1934). His writings on practical issues are replete with evidence of his wide historical knowledge. In the outreach of his churchmanship, Dr. Richards was a true successor of Philip Schaff, through whose initiative the Society of Church History was founded.

ROBERT HASTINGS NICHOLS

The death on July 18, 1955, of Robert Hastings Nichols has removed one of the leading members of the Society of Church History. Dr. Nichols was President of the Society in 1920 and served for twenty-nine years as its honored Treasurer. He was born in Rochester, New York, October 2, 1873, and took a B.A. degree with distinction at Yale in 1894. Two years later he received at Yale the degree of Ph.D. in the field of English Literature. Having spent two years in the teaching of English he entered the theological course in Auburn Seminary. He spent his middle year in

theology in Mansfield College, Oxford, and returned to complete the work in Auburn, 1901. For nine years he served in pastorates of the Presbyterian Church, in Unadilla, New York, and South Orange, New Jersey.

In 1910 Dr. Nichols began his teaching career in Auburn as Assistant Professor of Church History and was promoted to a full professorship in 1914. He later became Secretary of the Auburn faculty and Secretary of the Commission of the Presbyterian General Assembly on the Revision of the *Book of Common Worship*. He was Stated Clerk of the Synod of New York for twenty-nine years. He helped to found and to edit the *Presbyterian Tribune*. His noteworthy services to the church include the framing, in cooperation with Dr. Henry Sloane Coffin, of the Auburn Affirmation of 1924, a document of crucial importance in turning the tides against Fundamentalism and restoring peace to Presbyterianism.

As a teacher he was much beloved, though held in awe because of his exacting standards. His text book, *The Growth of the Christian Church*, 1914 (revised edition, 1941) has been used by generations of students. When Auburn Seminary was removed to the Union Seminary campus (in 1939)

Dr. Nichols became a valued member of the joint faculty and there even after his retirement in 1944 he continued for some years to give special courses.

In 1921 he received the degree of D.D. from George Washington University. This Journal has profited by his services as Editor, in collaboration with Professor Matthew Spinka, for sixteen years. Articles that he contributed to *Church History* include: "The Plan of Union in New York" (Volume V, 1936); "The Influence of the American Environment on the Conception of the Church in American Protestantism" (IX, 1942); "Tercenary of the Westminster Assembly" (XIII, 1944); and "The First Synod of New York" (XIV, 1945).

A competent and resourceful scholar, Dr. Nichols was at the same time completely unpretentious, and always graciously serviceable to his colleagues and students. Through his wisdom and kindness he was to many a trusted friend. His stalwart figure and gracious smile will be well remembered for many years. Despite the handicap of growing deafness and the loss of a leg in his mid-seventies, his valiant spirit was never daunted and a visit with him was always a spiritual tonic.