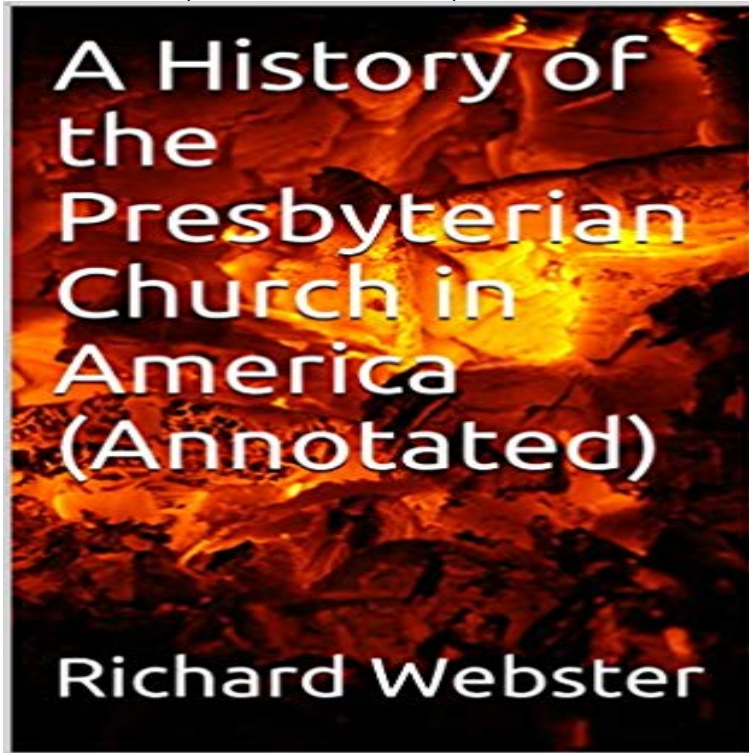


A History of the Presbyterian Church in America (Annotated)



BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH OF THE KEY. RICHARD WEBSTER. The writer of this sketch was on familiar terms of intercourse with the late Rev. Richard Webster. Born and brought up in the same city, contemporaries in age, and students in the same theological seminary, a friendship existed between us which ripened with the progress of time and was interrupted only by death. My friend, in his will, bequeathed to me his historical manuscripts: they are now published in the same condition in which he left them. In our last interview, I asked Mr. Webster when his history would be ready for the press. He answered, with a smile, Never; I am all the time making corrections and additions. The truth is, that his work was left in an imperfect state; but it will nevertheless be highly appreciated by the public as a valuable repository of Presbyterian history and biography. Another remark I may make here respecting his work is, that it only professes to give the early portion of the history of our church. The period embraced in the present volume is a little more than half a century, and is limited to the reunion of the Synods of New York and Philadelphia, in 1758. The reader, therefore, must not expect to find a complete history of the Presbyterian church in the United States. The early portion, which is exceedingly rich in events and in illustrious men, possesses a peculiar interest; and this is the portion comprehended within the scope of Mr. Webster's researches, now published. It is my purpose to make a few remarks on the character of the lamented author of this volume, chiefly in connection with his devotion to history; and to incorporate into this sketch, on other points, the views and opinions of brethren who were more intimately acquainted with his ministerial character and habits of life. Richard Webster was born in the city of Albany, New York, on the 14th of July, 1811, and

was the youngest child of Charles R. Webster and Cynthia Steele. His father was a prominent bookseller in that city, and publisher of an influential newspaper. Richards love of books and of newspaper-writing was undoubtedly nurtured by his fathers occupation. His mother belonged to one of the good old families in Albany whose praise is in the churches. The young child was trained according to the principles of the covenant of promise, and was brought up under the ministry and ordinances of the First Presbyterian Church, which was at that time under the pastoral care of the Rev. Dr. William Neill, and subsequently of the Rev. Dr. Henry R. Weed and the Rev. Dr. John N. Campbell, the latter of whom is still pastor of the church. Richard Webster early professed his faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, and, while the dew of youth was upon him, united himself with the followers of the Redeemer. The principal facts in his life will be presented in extracts from the personal reminiscences and testimony of others. God gave to Richard Webster a good, vigorous intellect. Even a casual observer could not fail to see the flashes of intelligence which emanated from no ordinary mental constitution. In the true acceptation of the word he might be called a talented man, sprightly, however, rather than logical, and original and ready rather than very profound. Well cultivated in early life, his mind expanded under the influence of the collegiate and theological course, and received great strength and discipline from the higher studies incident to his profession. His intellectual powers were far above the average of those of his ministerial brethren; and, although not in the first rank, occupied by the privileged few alone, he was certainly prominent among the many who belong to the class of able, well-endowed, useful men. With a retentive and excellent memory, Mr. Webster treasured up what he acquired. He was a hard student all his life. His professional education was regarded only as a means to an end. The preliminary course had but prepared him to continue

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