REV. ROBERT LOWRY, D. D.

Dr. Lowry, whose portrait appears on our front page, was born in Philadelphia, March 12, 1826. In 1843 he was baptized by the Rev. George B. Ide, D. D., and received into the First Baptist church. He at once became active in Sunday school work, especially in connection with missions. He gradually developed a gift for conducting religious meetings, and became prominent in leading the service of sacred song. Eventually he attracted the attention of his pastor, who invited him to spend an evening in his study. The pastor solemnly expressed his conviction that the young man ought to study for the ministry. Young Lowry confessed that for years this had been his most cherished desire, but that he had never had the courage to express it nor allow himself to hope that it could be realized. The interview of the evening gave shape to his subsequent life.

In 1848 he came to Lewisburg. It was a day of small things, but great expectations in the history of the University. All the departments met and recited in the basement of the old Baptist church. Knowledge was pursued under difficulties. The completion of the Academy building was like the marking of an epoch. When the West Wing was ready for occupancy, there was nothing more to be desired.

Robert Lowry spent six years in Lewisburg. He interested himself in everything. The Society for Christian Inquiry was a great institution in those days. The literary society was popular with the students. The musical association embraced all the vocal talent of both sexes. In all these he was active. He organized the church choir, and led the singing in the social meetings. He taught a private class of students in the rudiments of music, and had a Bible class in the Sunday school. He went off occasionally with others to hold a meeting in a school house, and sing or talk, as the occasion might require. He wrote and composed a farewell song for the first graduating class in 1851, which was sung by the musical association at commencement. That was before the introduction of brass bands. He held a meeting, in conjunction with C. M. Deitz, at McEwensville, which resulted in several baptisms and the organization of a church. During the last two years of his student life he preached every Sunday, dividing his time between McEwensville and White Deer Valley. He was graduated in 1854.
In quick succession followed his ordination, his marriage and acceptance of a call to West Chester, Pa. Here he found the church with no meeting house, but making arrangement to build. In two years a beautiful edifice was completed, dedicated and filled with worshippers. The Sunday school was thoroughly organized by the pastor, who took charge of it personally and conducted its musical service. It became a great power in the town. He identified himself also with the teachers' institute of Chester county, and delivered several lectures. For a time he also edited one of the local journals.

In 1858 he was called to the Bloomingdale Baptist church, New York city. He entered on this broader field of work with great enthusiasm. Lots were purchased for a large and commanding church edifice, and the foundation was laid with flattering prospects. The outbreak of the Rebellion brought the enterprise to a sudden stop. Business was paralyzed and the air was full of war. A large number of young men were preparing to go to the front. One evening, after several persons had been examined as candidates for baptism, about a dozen revolvers were distributed among those who had enlisted for the conflict. It was an exciting time, and no one seemed to think that baptism and revolvers were incongruous.

In the spring of 1861 some members of the Hanson Place Baptist church, Brooklyn, in search of a pastor, dropped in at the Bloomingdale church one Sunday, and concluded that that was the man for them if they could get him. Negotiations were opened quietly, but, as the pastor was committed to the project of the new church edifice, he would not receive overtures from any source while there was any hope of carrying forward the business enterprise. When it became evident that the movement must be abandoned or indefinitely postponed, then the Hanson Place people extended a call, and it was accepted. Here he remained for over eight years. He has always regarded this as an ideal pastorate. The congregation was small when he went there, and the debt was heavy; the former grew to fill the house and the latter to insignificant dimensions. Hundreds were received into membership, and a colony sent out for mission purposes developed into the Sixth Avenue church. Outside interests enlisted a large portion of his attention. Sunday school institutes, public meetings, the Sons of Temperance, and denominational boards claimed and received a large share of his time and sympathy. The Long Island Baptist Association, now so strong and
vigorouss, was brought into being mainly through his instrumentality. The
pastors' conference, a body of uncertain constituency, was kept steadily to its
routine life during the years of his secretaryship. Half the funerals at which
he officiated were those of strangers. It was a life of incessant activity, but
he delighted in the work and found it impossible to be weary.

In 1869 President Loomis called to see him, bearing a proposition to enter
the University as Professor of Rhetoric. If it had come from any other insti-
tution, or through any other man, it would not have been entertained for a
moment. But love for his church and love for his Alma Mater made the ques-
tion a painful and perplexing one. There was no apparent reason why he
should abandon a position of prominence and usefulness, and bury himself
out of sight, as it seemed, in an inland town. It took several months to
determine what was the right thing to do. Finally Alma Mater triumphed.
He accepted the appointment of the trustees, and removed with his family to
Lewisburg. At the same time he accepted a call as pastor of the Baptist
church. Doing the services of these two offices he continued for six years.
The record of these years need not be repeated here. It survives in the
hearts of the boys whom he taught, and in the church to which he
ministered. Long before the expiration of this time, he felt this double work
was unduly taxing him. It did not seem practicable to divide it, and so he
concluded he must withdraw from it all and rest. In 1875 he retired,
bearing with him a token of the esteem and confidence of the faculty.

He took up his abode in Plainfield, N. J., intending after a year's
recovery and private study, to resume the ministerial work. He had not
been there long before a movement was made to organize a church in a new
part of the city. This movement was made contingent on Dr. Lowry's
accepting the leadership. This he was reluctant to do, but ultimately threw
himself into the work with all his energy. It was successful from the start,
and resulted in building a new church edifice valued at $50,000. Here he
preached for nine years, at the end of which time he gave up his pastorate,
and took his place as a high private among his brethren.

Dr. Lowry has always felt a sort of discomfort that he is better known
as a hymn writer and musical composer than as a preacher. From earliest boy-
hood he was a singer, with a natural gift for composing tunes. Many years
before he knew anything of the science of music, he constructed musical
scores which publishers were glad to put into print. Discovering that music was an art as well as an instinct, he gave himself to a thorough study of harmony. By a mere accident his name became associated with sacred song, and he has never been able to break away from the association. But he regards the preaching of the gospel as his highest work, and everything else is subordinated to that. He has edited books for churches, choirs and Sunday schools, one of them selling more than a million of copies.

A year or two after his graduation he was initiated into the Phi Kappa Psi Fraternity. At the Grand Arch Council, held in Washington, he was elected president of the fraternity. At several of the district councils and grand councils he has delivered speeches and poems. He is a patriarchal member of the Phi Kappa Psi Alumni Club of New York city. He delights to meet his brethren of Pennsylvania Gamma in their symposium at the annual commencement. He has warm friends in the other fraternities.

Dr. Lowry has traveled through Canada, the New England States, the Western States and the Colorado canyon, the Southern States and Mexico. Twice he has made the tour of Europe. At the Robert Raikes centennial in 1880, he attended the meeting of the delegates in London, at which speeches were made by representative men from all parts of the world. At the close of the meeting the chairman, a member of Parliament, rose and said: "I am told that Dr. Lowry, the author of 'Shall We Gather at the River?', is present; we should be glad to hear from him." The effect was startling. As Dr. Lowry came forward and stood on the platform, the whole audience broke forth in applause. People rose to their feet and waved their handkerchiefs. For some minutes it was impossible to say a word. Not more than a dozen Americans in the room had ever seen the man, but they gave spontaneous tribute to the song writer whose name had been a household word to them for many years.

After relinquishing his professorship, Dr. Lowry was elected Chancellor of the University, which office he held until the Board of Curators was legis­lated out of existence.