J. H. A. BOMBERGER
President of General Synod, 1890
CHAPTER X

CLOSING DAYS

Dr. Bomberger's heart was warmed with grateful appreciation when the General Synod of the Reformed Church at Lebanon, in the early part of June, 1890, conferred upon him the highest honor it could bestow by electing him its president. At this time of life, being in his seventy-fourth year, he was not seeking honors, and the synod's action was, therefore, the more kindly conferred and the more affectionately received. He had fought a long and hard fight in the church in the interest of her ancient and honorable beliefs and customs; yet this distinction seemed to him not so much a triumph as a tribute.

He returned to the college to conduct the exercises of the nineteenth annual commencement, which was soon to follow, with his usual interest in the institution quickened by the gracious action of the church, for he had come to regard any favor to himself as a favor also to the college with which he had long since become completely identified. His report to the directors at their annual meeting contained a devout acknowledgment of Divine grace. He made kindly references to the student body and gave expression to his sincere regard for his associates in
the faculty in whose behalf he expressed the hope that the time might be near when they could be more adequately compensated for their work.

He made no reference in this written report to the magnificent offer of Robert Patterson, made shortly before the report was read, providing $25,000 toward the erection of an administration building, although he refers to the pressing need of such a building. Yet his words bear indications of the buoyancy of spirit that was certainly engendered by the knowledge that this announcement would be made in the meeting. Just as the church a few weeks before in honoring him had honored the college, so now this generous offer betokened not only regard for the college, but also for him. What a happy circumstance that these cheering things should eventuate when life's close was soon to press upon him!

After commencement he sought much needed rest in a week's sojourn at Ocean Grove, New Jersey. His family, through the death of Mrs. Bomberger, the marriage of his daughters and the entrance of his sons upon their work in the world, had now all taken leave. As though his own approaching leave-taking was foreseen by him, he asked his children to come to the seaside to spend the week with him. All but his daughter Clara (Mrs. Brecht), who resided in Florida, were able to accept his invitation. Refreshed by the rest and made happy by the reunion of his children, he returned to Collegeville to take up his summer's work, which included weekly
meetings with the Executive Committee in planning to meet the conditions of Mr. Patterson's gift, and in filling vacancies in the faculty. As was his wont, he accepted invitations to preach. On a Sunday early in August, the last before his final illness set in, he preached in a neighboring church, his theme having been "Heaven on Earth."

On occasions, he had said that it was his hope that he might "die in the harness," and this hope was fulfilled. When the malady that proved fatal first attacked him, but a fortnight before he died, he was enjoying the vigor of a well-preserved old age. During the brief period of rapidly wasting physical strength which ensued, his faculties of mind retained their brightest luster. On the morning of August nineteenth, he entered into glory, slowly repeating in deep measured words, "Onward—Christian—Soldiers! Onward—Onward—Onward!"

The following lines on his death from the pen of his son, the late Augustus Wight Bomberger, published anonymously in the Ursinus College Bulletin, and offered here in loving regard for the son as well as the father, constitute a fitting close for this volume:

All thro' the Night, alone, yet not alone,
A mighty man has wrestled in the Valley;
And still Death's awful shades encompass him,
And hide his path, and trap his weary footsteps,
Nor give a distant sign of breaking day.
But he that wrestles is a seasoned warrior,
Touched at enlistment by the flame of Heaven:
And in this darkest hour of final conflict,
The great High-Captain of his host, that went before,
Has looked in mercy on his weight of years,
His deep-set scars, his ill-dissembled weakness;
And pitying love has moved: And, lo!
A wondrous vision of a legion true,
That rallies at his very back, with throbbing breath,
And, dauntless, follows in his lead to triumph,
Is sent to give him strength.

He feels its thrilling pulse: His chieftain heart,
To inspiration swift, is stirred with fire,
Until burns in his veins the holy joy
That faithful champions of an army know,
When battling for the right.
Nor does he falter now, or faint, but presses on,
His form erect; his venerable head,
In majesty of faith, uplifted high: Upon his face,
A luminous expectance—half-fulfilled,
(Like that, perchance, which shone from angel eyes,
At earliest dawn, about the guarded tomb
Of Him of Nazareth, ere night gave forth
The Resurrection joy,)
As if he saw afar the gleam of Morning,
And waited but to greet its blessed light.

Bravely he wins his way; and as he goes,
In solemn tones, deep-rising from his fervid soul,
Incites the spirit cohorts in their course,
As Christian soldiers, marching on to God.

Yet even now the bitter fight is done!
For just ahead, emerging from the gloom,
Their summit shown in outline strong and clear,
The hills eternal stand. Now twilight dim,
CLOSING DAYS

Turns at a breath to noon. Glad wings of life
Unloosen weary feet; the host behind
Becomes a host before, in radiance clad.
For Day has dawned,—the deathless Day of Heaven.
And fullest strength is come to him that strove,
And love and rest, and joy made pure by grief,
And fountain-springs of youth, and sweet release,
And Christ the crown of all,—and perfect peace.

THE END.