

George R. Crooks

A.B., A.M. D.D., LL.D.
Professor of Historical Theology, 1880-1897.

Summary

George R. Crooks joined Drew in 1880 as professor of historical theology, upon the departure of President Hurst. An ordained minister, Crooks had been a long-time advocate of theological training and editor of *The Methodist*. Crooks was one of "the Great Five" revered professors who led Drew for decades. He died in 1897.

Article

The Reverence George Richard Crooks was one of [the Big Five](#) professors whose teaching and leadership shaped the early Drew Theological Seminary.

Dr. Crooks would have been a charter member of the faculty if [Dr. McClintock](#) and [Mr. Drew](#) had had their way. For he had won his spurs as a scholar and leader of men, and was hand in glove with [McClintock](#), whom he had known from boyhood in Philadelphia and with whom he had collaborated on a series of classical textbooks when they were colleagues on the faculty of Dickinson College.

But in 1867 Dr. Crooks was in his editorial shirtsleeves in New York, fighting one of the fiercest ecclesiastical battles in Methodist history. Eventually victory wrought a revolution in the polity of the church. For it broke the ministerial monopoly of power by admitting laymen - male laymen - to membership in the General Conference. (It took another fight, a generation later, to "get the women in.")

Scholar that he was, he had proved himself a first-class fighting man by his editorship of *The Methodist*, in New York, the doughty unofficial rival of the official weekly - *The Christian Advocate*, which stood for the status quo, and took a sound beating. The editor had already worked his way up to the first rank in the ministry, and had written several books of recognized worth, while serving pastorates in Philadelphia, Wilmington, New York East and New York Conferences.

The battle won, he returned to the pastorate, where he found abundant employment for his rare pulpit gifts. But, no sooner was a teaching chair at Drew vacated by the Call of [Dr. Hurst](#) to the episcopal office in 1880, than he was invited to take his place as professor of Historical Theology. His friends [McClintock](#), [Nadal](#) and [Foster](#) were gone, but [James Strong](#), who had fought by his side in the laymen's battle, was still at Madison. This was Dr. Crooks' rightful niche.

Twenty-five years before as a young man he had supported John Dempster and other forward-looking men in their struggle to legalize the establishment of schools like Drew where young Methodist men might be trained for the ministry. And now his opportunity had come to put all his acquisitions of ripe experience and life-long study into just such an institution. He had had full teaching practice at Dickinson; the text-books which he had helped to prepare showed that he had mastered the science of imparting knowledge; fruitful years in charge of churches small and great had given him intimate acquaintance with the conditions under which his pupils would have to do their work when "the great iron wheel" of the itinerancy commenced to revolve. Moreover, he was a conspicuous figure in Methodism; not a "has been," but mature, vital, vigorous, at the very top of his powers.

Everything that he had been he could put into this teaching job. This he proceeded to do. And he had the time of his life. As a lecturer he was the farthest possible removed from dullness. He was described as "painstaking, conscientious, energetic and successful." Though in his 60s he had not settled down to a fixed set of opinions. Of a progressive, even radical temper, he kept his mind open toward the newer movements of thought, read with discrimination all the newer literature of his field, and kept his pupils in touch with the times. He was anything but the drillmaster type of pedagogue.

In those years he also found time to write the life of Bishop Simpson and to edit his sermons. Before he came to Drew he had produced his fine *Life of McClintock*. The vision of what his bosom friend the great first president would be doing, if he were still at the helm, must often have risen before Dr. Crooks as he walked beneath these oaks and looked into the faces of the earnest youth in his lecture room. He could not help dwelling upon the pioneer's plans for the development of the school, and he was continually suggesting ways in which the lofty ideals of the founders might be realized and suited to the changing conditions. A short man, inclined to stoutness, ruddy of countenance, a sort of John Bull; but gracious in manner, an enthusiast for his church, but not blind to its faults, and doing his best, as long as life lasted, to train its ministers to be worthy of the high vocation wherewith they were called.

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