

JOHN C. VAN DYKE (1861-1931)

Librarian at the New Brunswick Theological Seminary and professor of Art History at Rutgers College (later University) at the turn of the 20th century, John C. Van Dyke was an indefatigable traveler, lecturer, and author, a tale-spinner of his own life in the old frontier tradition, a rugged individualist as well versed in Nature as in Culture, as well acquainted with the salons of the Old World as with the saloons of the New. In short, an art *aficionado* such as they come only in America. The title of his "contribution to the Rembrandt controversy," *Rembrandt and His School: A Critical Study of the Master and His Pupils with a New Assignment of Their Pictures* (Scribner's, 1923) summarizes his pioneer effort to whittle the Rembrandt oeuvre down to a more reasonable size at a time when European art experts had inflated it to over 700 paintings. A man who could write about Rembrandt "dragging his whole family into paint," could hardly be sensitive to the finer points of connoisseurship, such as respecting the opinion of the "Rembrandt doctors". Here is a further sample of his plain talk:

"There is evidence in abundance, and to the point of saturation, to prove that the works of Rembrandt's pupils have been 'signed up' falsely and sold as Rembrandts. This is common knowledge to people familiar with the history and criticism of art. All gallery directors, collectors, and dealers know about it and smile over it. The catalogues and guide-books and art histories are full of it. No one attempts to deny it. Yet the average reader may not know about it, or may think of the special pleading of the iconoclast, so for his benefit I may recite a few instances that have been recognized alike by Christian and pagan."

(Chap. II, The Signature).

The smiles froze immediately, of course, when his book came out in print and his name was quickly relegated to that special oblivion in Rembrandt scholarship reserved for opinionated whippersnappers (see entry 56). For all his faults, a very tonic author.

