

ANNALS

OF THE

AMERICAN PULPIT;

OR

COMMEMORATIVE NOTICES

OF

DISTINGUISHED AMERICAN CLERGYMEN

OF

VARIOUS DENOMINATIONS,

FROM THE EARLY SETTLEMENT OF THE COUNTRY TO THE CLOSE OF THE YEAR
EIGHTEEN HUNDRED AND FIFTY-FIVE.

WITH HISTORICAL INTRODUCTIONS.

BY WILLIAM B. SPRAGUE, D. D.

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CALEB ALEXANDER.*

1778—1828.

CALEB ALEXANDER was born in Northfield, Mass., on the 22d of July, 1755. He was a great-grandson of John Alexander, who, with several brothers, emigrated from Scotland, in the early settlement of New England, and planted themselves on Connecticut River. His grandfather, John Alexander, with twelve others, first purchased from the Indians the land that constituted the old town of Northfield. His father was Simeon Alexander, a respectable farmer, who, during the Revolution, rendered good service, in different ways, to his country. His mother's maiden name was Sarah Howe—she was a sister of Caleb Howe, who was killed by the Indians at Hinsdale, N. H., in July, 1775, and whose family were carried captives to Lower Canada. Both his parents were exemplary members of the church.

Young Alexander seems to have early conceived the idea of obtaining a liberal education, though he spent the period of his youth chiefly in labouring on his father's farm. He entered Dartmouth College, and remained there till his Senior year, (1776,) when he was recommended by President Wheelock to be admitted to the same standing in Yale College. The following is an extract from the President's letter:—"He is another of that number of which I have sent you several already, who was, in the judgment of Christian charity, the subject of God's saving mercy, in that special season of the outpouring of his Spirit here, the winter before last. The change appearing in the youth was very great, as, before it, he was considerably of the wild order; but ever since, as far as I have seen or heard, he has adorned his Christian profession by a truly religious and exemplary conversation. He has been a diligent student and a good scholar." He was graduated at Yale in 1777; and took his second degree at Brown University in 1789.

Mr. Alexander entered on the study of Theology soon after he left College, under the direction of the Rev. Ephraim Judson of Taunton; and on the 14th of October, 1778, was licensed to preach the Gospel, at Groton, Conn., by the Eastern Association of New London County.

On the 28th of February, 1781, he was ordained Pastor of the Church in New Marlborough; but this relation continued for only a short time. He seems to have given offence to a portion of his congregation by the great directness and pungency of his preaching,—which was strongly Calvinistic; though the council that dismissed him, in recognising this fact, bear an honourable testimony to his fidelity. His dismissal took place on the 28th of June, 1782. On the 26th of December, 1785, he received a call to settle over the Church in Mendon, Mass.; and was installed as its Pastor, on the 12th of April, 1786,—the Rev. Dr. Emmons of Franklin preaching the installation sermon.

In 1801, he was appointed by the Massachusetts Missionary Society to visit the Churches and Indians in the Western part of New York. On his return, he sought and obtained a dismission from his congregation, partly on account of the inadequacy of his support, and partly from a conviction

* Hist. Mendon Association.—MS. from his son, W. H. Alexander, Esq.

that there was a field of usefulness open at the West, which it was desirable that he should occupy. The date of his dismissal was the 7th of December, 1802. On his return to the State of New York, he divided his ministerial labours among the three Churches of Salisbury, Norway, and Fairfield, giving one third of the Sabbaths in the year to each Church. He was also instrumental in founding the Academy at Fairfield, and became its first Principal; and it enjoyed, under his direction, a large share of public favour. In 1807, he relinquished his charge of the Church in Norway, from their inability to fulfil their pecuniary engagements. He subsequently discontinued his labours at Salisbury; and in the summer of 1811, resigned his charge at Fairfield also, on account of the insufficiency of his salary. The officers of the Fairfield Church gave him, on his leaving them, the strongest testimony of their confidence and regard.

It was not merely as Pastor of the Church, but as Principal of the Academy, at Fairfield, that Mr. Alexander received but a stinted compensation for his services; and, accordingly, in January, 1812, he tendered his resignation as Principal, expressing, at the same time, his conviction that it was impossible to build up an institution at Fairfield of so liberal a type as he had projected and wished for. He now became interested in establishing a College, where the prospects seemed more encouraging; and, accordingly, he united with several other gentlemen to advance Hamilton Academy at Clinton to the dignity of a College. The effort proved successful; and, on the 22d of July, 1812, he was unanimously elected President of the new institution. He, however, did not accept the place; and, in the autumn of the same year, he removed his family to Onondaga Hollow, where he had been earnestly solicited to come and co-operate with several others in the establishment of an Academy. The Academy went into operation, and, for the first four years, he was its Principal. He then resigned the place, and retired to a farm in the neighbourhood; but he now became interested in the founding of the Theological Seminary at Auburn, and engaged in this enterprise also with great zeal and energy. In September, 1820, he was appointed General Agent to solicit donations for the endowment of Professorships in the institution; and he discharged the arduous trust with a good degree of success.

In 1822, the Connecticut Missionary Society appointed him missionary to the destitute churches within the bounds of the Onondaga Presbytery; and in this way he was occupied about nine months. During the last five years of his life, much of his time was devoted to writing for religious newspapers, and to efforts in other ways for the advancement of the cause of education and Christianity. He continued to preach, as his services were called for, till almost the close of his life.

His last illness was very short, or rather he may be said to have declined without any perceptible illness. He died at Onondaga, on the 12th of April, 1828, in the seventy-third year of his age. His Funeral Sermon was preached by the Rev. Washington Thacher.*

*WASHINGTON THACHER, a son of Deacon Moses Thacher, was born at Attleborough, Mass., February 23, 1794, but removed early with his father's family to Nine Partners (now Harford) Pa.; received his classical education under the Rev. Lyman Richardson; studied Theology under the Rev. John Truair; was licensed to preach by the Otsego Presbytery in 1821; was ordained in 1822; officiated as stated supply at Morrisville, N. Y., from 1822 to 1826; was Pastor of the Church in Jordan, N. Y., from 1826 to 1842; resigned his charge on account of ill health; was afterwards a stated supply at Eaton, N. Y., three years; was appointed Secretary and Agent of the Central Agency of the American Home Missionary Society in July, 1847; and died June 29, 1850. He was an eminently devout man, and an earnest and effective preacher.

Mr. Alexander was married in 1780, to Lucina, daughter of the Rev. Thomas Strong,* his predecessor at New Marlborough. She died in Onondaga, November 24, 1847, aged ninety-one. They had nine children. One of the daughters was married to the Rev. Dr. Lansing,† then of Auburn. One son, *William H.*, (the only one who arrived at maturity,) still (1857) survives, and resides at Syracuse.

The following are Mr. Alexander's publications:—An Essay on the real Deity of Jesus Christ, 1791. A Dissertation on the Psalms, showing them to be a pre-history of Jesus Christ, 1796. A Sermon preached at Mendon on the death of George Washington, 1800. English Grammar abridged, 1793. Grammatical System of the Latin language, 1795. A New Introduction to the Latin language, 1795. A Grammatical system of the Grecian language, 1796. A Spelling Book on an improved plan, 1799. The Columbian Dictionary, 1800. A new and complete System of Arithmetic, 1802. A Grammatical System of the English language, 1814. Virgil's works translated into literal prose. The Young lady's and Gentleman's Instructor.

FROM THE HON. OLIVER R. STRONG.

SYRACUSE, July 21, 1855.

Dear Sir: The early part of my life was passed at Pittsfield, Mass., a few miles from New Marlborough, where the Rev. Caleb Alexander, for some years, exercised his ministry; and this, in connection with the fact that Mrs. Alexander was remotely connected with my father, rendered his name and reputation familiar to me from my youth. It was not, however, until about the year 1810, when I came to reside in this State, (New York,) that I became personally acquainted with him. Our acquaintance commenced at the time when he first came to Onondaga,

* THOMAS STRONG was a native of Northampton, Mass., was graduated at Yale College in 1740; was ordained first Pastor of the Church in New Marlborough, October 31, 1744; and died August 23, 1777.

† DIRCK CORNELIUS LANSING was born at Lansingburg, N. Y., March 3, 1785, and was graduated at Yale College in 1804. He became hopefully pious during a revival in College and joined the College Church. He studied Theology under the Rev. Dr. Blatchford of Lansingburg, and was licensed to preach by the Presbytery of Columbia, on the 6th of January, 1806. In the autumn of the same year, he gathered a church, where now stands the flourishing town of Onondaga, and had the pastoral charge of it for eight years. He then, on account of the failure of his health, retired awhile upon a farm, but continued to preach, as he had opportunity, on the Sabbath, and soon became the acting Pastor of the Church in Stillwater, N. Y., where he remained two years and a half. In the summer of 1816, he supplied, for some time, the Park Street Church in Boston; and soon after accepted a call from the First Presbyterian Church in Auburn, N. Y. Here he acquired great popularity, and was instrumental of bringing upwards of one thousand persons into the church in twelve years. During a part of the time also he filled the chair of Sacred Rhetoric in the Theological Seminary. In July, 1829, he took charge of the Second Presbyterian Church in Utica, where he continued to labour with great zeal, and was, as he had previously been, an earnest friend to what were commonly called "protracted meetings" and other kindred instrumentalities for promoting revivals. On the 10th of February, 1833, he was installed Pastor of a Free Church in New York, then worshipping in Masonic Hall, and retained this charge until the spring of 1835, when ill health again obliged him to suspend his public labours. For the next ten years, he was not confined to any one place, but laboured in many pulpits in Central and Western New York, as an evangelist or stated supply, and spent one year in Illinois, where he was instrumental in organizing a church, and building a place of worship. In 1846, he returned to the city of New York, and took charge of a feeble Missionary Church in Chrystie Street. In the spring of 1848, he engaged in the enterprise of building up the Clinton Avenue Church, which had been organized in November of the preceding year. He was its first Pastor; but on account of his enfeebled health, the relation was dissolved on the 19th of December, 1855, and in the spring of 1856, he removed to Walnut Hills, near Cincinnati, O., where he died on the 19th of March, 1857, aged seventy-two. He published a volume of Sermons (octavo) in 1825; and received the degree of Doctor of Divinity from Williams College in 1826. An eloquent Sermon was delivered on the occasion of his death by the Rev. Dr. Thompson of the Broadway Tabernacle, which represents his character as combining many noble qualities, and his life as one of great activity and usefulness.

to take measures for establishing an Academy, over which he subsequently presided for some years; and being myself one of the Trustees of the institution, we were frequently brought together in relations of both business and friendship. I often heard him preach, and saw him in private under a great variety of circumstances; and, in his last illness, he appointed me one of the executors of his will.

In form, Mr. Alexander was thick set, and about five feet, nine or ten inches in height. He was slightly lame, and walked in a manner that would indicate that one leg was shorter than the other. His face was full, broad, of rather a florid complexion, and expressive of reflection and intelligence. His manners evinced a benevolent spirit, and yet he was distinguished for strength of purpose. I well remember that his tenacity and perseverance used to be indicated by his being called, "the old Scotchman,"—with reference to his Scotch descent. Though I cannot say that he was reserved in conversation, yet neither was he particularly communicative, except on some special occasions; and then he would make himself highly interesting. He was exceedingly amiable and exemplary in his private relations, and was pre-eminently a loved and loving husband and father.

I think Mr. Alexander never ranked among the more popular preachers of his day. His discourses were, I believe, always sensible and edifying; his voice was sufficiently full and clear, but not remarkable for smoothness; he had little or no gesture, and not much animation. Whenever I heard him preach, I think he read his discourses, though I believe it was very common for him to preach from short notes. The excellence of his preaching doubtless lay rather in the matter than in the manner.

I will only add that Mr. Alexander sustained a very high character as a teacher, and I believe pretty uniformly secured the confidence and affection of his pupils, as well as the approbation of their parents.

I regret that it is not in my power to give you a more extended description of the subject of your inquiry; but if what I have written shall be at all available to your purpose, I shall be highly gratified.

I am, my dear Sir, with great respect,

Your friend and servant,

OLIVER R. STRONG.

STEPHEN BLOOMER BALCH, D. D.*

1779—1833.

STEPHEN BLOOMER BALCH was a descendant of John Balch, who emigrated to New England, at an early period, from Bridgewater in Somerset, England, and became possessed of large property and extensive influence. A great grandson of his removed to Deer Creek in Harford County, Md.; and there the subject of this sketch was born on the 5th of April, 1747. He was the second son of James† and Anne (Goodwyn) Balch; both of whom were exemplary members of the Presbyterian Church. His father was a man of a highly gifted and cultivated mind, had a fine poetical talent, and was the author of some anonymous pieces that had no small celebrity in their

* Religious Telegraph, (Richmond, Va.,) 1833.—MS. from his son, Rev. T. B. Balch.

† According to another authority, James Balch emigrated directly from England to Maryland.