

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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VOLUME II.

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## DAVID AUSTIN.

1781—1831.

FROM THE REV. NICHOLAS MURRAY, D. D.

ELIZABETHTOWN, January 1, 1850.

My dear Sir: You ask of me some account of the REV. DAVID AUSTIN, one of my predecessors in the church with which I am here connected as pastor. With this request I cheerfully comply. Having seen Mr. Austin once when I was a boy, and hearing very much about him, on my settlement here, from some of the old people, upon whose minds he made a very deep impression, I set myself industriously at work to collect all that was needful to form a true narrative of his life and character. The following narrative is the result of my researches, and is placed at your disposal.

David Austin was born in New Haven, Conn., in the year 1760. His father, who was a man of great respectability, piety, and wealth, was, for many years, Collector of the Customs, and afterwards a successful merchant. David was the eldest of a numerous family, all the members of which who lived to maturity, became hopefully pious. He was early fitted for College, and was graduated at Yale in 1779. After graduating, he pursued his theological studies with Dr. Bellamy, and, according to the custom of that day, was soon licensed to preach the Gospel. He preached to great acceptance, and in several places was strongly solicited to settle as a pastor. Having determined to visit Europe, before taking a pastoral charge, he declined all these proposals, some of which were highly flattering and advantageous. He spent some time in foreign travel, and returned with an ardent desire for the work of the ministry. He married Miss Lydia Lathrop of Norwich, whose father was a wealthy and highly respectable citizen of that town; and, shortly afterwards,—September 9, 1788, was ordained and installed pastor of the Presbyterian church in Elizabethtown.

From the time of his settlement, he continued his labours here, greatly beloved and extensively useful, until the close of 1795. The effect of a natural eccentricity connected with a most enlarged benevolence, which his private fortune enabled him to exercise, was only to increase the number of his ardent friends. In that year he had a violent attack of scarlet fever, from which he but slowly recovered, and which very seriously affected his mind. During the period of his convalescence, he commenced the study of the Prophecies, and the effect was soon obvious in a mental derangement from which he never wholly recovered. When he resumed his labours, he commenced preaching on the sixtieth chapter of Isaiah, from which he taught the doctrine of the personal reign of Christ, and that his second coming was to take place on the fourth Sabbath of May, 1796. The attention of the people now became wonderfully excited, and such was the rush from neighbouring towns, that multitudes on the Sabbath could not get room to stand in church.

At length the appointed day drew near. On the previous evening, a meeting was held for prayer and preparation in the Methodist church, and the house was crowded. He dwelt on the history of the Ninevites, who repented at the preaching of Jonah, and exhorted his hearers to imitate

their example. Weeping and mourning were heard in all parts of the assembly. The next day the sun rose with more than its usual splendour, and a vast multitude of people crowded the house and surrounded it. But the day passed away without any unusual occurrence; and many of his followers were only now convinced that he was under a delusion, and that they had been deluded by him. His friends hoped that disappointment would dissipate his delusion, and the Session of his church remonstrated with him; but his ingenuity soon found excuses for his Lord's delay, and his enthusiasm was only the more inflamed. He charged his Session and the members of his church that opposed him, with the sin and guilt of Uzzah, and stated that it was because of the mere mercy of God that they did not suffer his punishment. At this time, he took the vow of a Nazarite, and preached incessantly,—sometimes three sermons a day, through that part of the country. Wherever he went, crowds followed him, and God overruled the excitement he produced to the conversion of many souls. His great theme was the near approach of the personal reign of Christ upon earth; and he maintained that, as Joshua led the Jews into the promised land, as John the Baptist was the forerunner of the Saviour, so he was appointed of God to bring in the glorious millennial reign of righteousness.

The congregation being now seriously agitated by his proceedings,—he having declared that he was about to establish a new Church on earth, a public meeting was called, and a committee of eleven was appointed to wait upon him. They stated their grievances, asked some questions as to his future proceedings, and requested a written answer. It was as follows:—

“To JONATHAN DAYTON, of the committee of eleven appointed by the congregation of Elizabethtown to wait on Mr. Austin, their pastor, in respect to the present course and object of his ministry, and of the concerns of the congregation in general:

“In conformity to the request of the committee, that the answer to their application might be given in writing, it may be said—

“In respect to that part of the paper read, which hinted at and complained of an avowed design of the pastor to institute a new Church, and to set up a new order of things in ecclesiastical concerns, ‘independent of the Presbytery, of the Synod, or of the General Assembly;’—it may be openly answered that such is my fixed and unalterable determination. For a warrant thus to proceed, reference may be had to the third and sixth chapters of the Prophecy of Zechariah, and to many other passages of Scripture, which foretell of these things and of these days.

“On the testimony of the Scriptures, and on the inward teachings of the Holy Spirit of God, and on the present aspect of Providence, and on uncommon and extraordinary revelations of the mind and will of God to this point, dependance is had in proof of a special and designating call to proceed in this solemn and interesting work.

“Be it known then to the committee, and to the congregation, and to the Presbyterian Church, and to the world at large, that such extraordinary call I do profess to have received; and that it is my glory openly to avow, and solemnly to profess, my determination to maintain and to discharge the duties of it, through the faith of that power and constant grace which hath called and accompanied me in this concern thus far.

‘Under such impressions, standing collected and firm, I again announce to the committee, to the congregation, and to all concerned, that implicit obedience to the voice of Heaven is my fixed determination.

“Let this declaration be productive of what consequences it may, be it remembered that the anticipations of Divine support are so ready and abundant, that the instrument of the Divine designs feels himself ready, and professes himself willing, to meet all obstacles, and to brave all dangers, in the prosecution of the noble object which Infinite Wisdom hath placed before him.

“The baptism of the cloud and of the sea opened the journey of God’s ancient Israel towards the goodly land; and answeringly to the former example, the present course of spiritual journeying is now to be taken up; and if the scenes of the ancient warfare are again to be repeated, faith in God pronounces the eternal arm to be mightily sufficient to secure the victory in every conflict in which his own shall be engaged. And it may be well for opposers to the predestinated purposes of God to remember that the disasters of those whose carcases fell through unbelief, and the utter extirpation of those who stood in the way of the advancing forward of the host of Israel in search of the goodly land, are but a lively figure of what those are to expect who are found imitating their faithless and wicked example in these latter days.

“Submitting the whole concern to the unqualified sovereignty of God, and to the decisions of those to whom these presents may come, I subscribe to the congregation an affectionate pastor, and to the people of God in every place, an unfeigned friend, and servant of God in Christ Jesus.

DAVID AUSTIN.

“Elizabethtown, Friday, April 7th, A. D. 1797.”

Twelve days after the receipt of the above answer, the following petition was sent to the Presbytery of New York, with which the church was then connected:—

“At a meeting of the Elders, Deacons, Trustees, and members of the First Presbyterian congregation in Elizabethtown, at their meeting house on Wednesday, the 19th of April, 1797, at two o’clock in the P. M. of that day, agreeable to adjournment, [Mr. Elias Dayton, Moderator, and Mr. Aaron Ogden, Clerk,] it was resolved, unanimously, that the following petition be presented to the Presbytery of New York, at their next session:—

“The Elders, Deacons, Trustees, and members of the First Presbyterian congregation in Elizabethtown, respectfully petition the Reverend Presbytery of New York to dissolve the pastoral relation now subsisting between the Rev. David Austin and said congregation, provided they are of opinion that the following reason is a sufficient foundation for the application,—namely, the declaration of the Rev. Mr. Austin’s intention to set up a new Church, independent of Presbytery, Synod, or General Assembly; as will fully appear by an acknowledgment under his own hand, and herewith sent.

“Resolved, unanimously, that Mr. Jeremiah Ballard, Benjamin Corey, and Shepard Kolloek, be a committee for the purpose of presenting the foregoing petition.

ELIAS DAYTON.

“Attest, Aaron Ogden, Clerk.”

The following is the decision of the Presbytery in the case, which, whilst it dissolves his pastoral relation to the congregation, and protests against his

errors, and warns the churches against him, yet bears ample testimony to his moral character.

“Thursday, May 4, 1797.

“The consideration of the petition from Elizabethtown was resumed. The Commissioners from the congregation of Elizabethtown, being asked whether they had any thing further to offer respecting the business, answered, ‘Not at present.’ Mr. Austin being then called upon to know whether he had any thing to offer respecting the petition and application before Presbytery from the congregation of Elizabethtown, replied that he had no objection to the Presbytery’s deciding upon that petition as they should think proper; and that he took this opportunity to signify his intention to withdraw, and declared that he actually did then withdraw from his connection with this Presbytery, and from all Presbyterial connection and government.

“The parties being removed, the Presbytery proceeded to deliberate and to form a judgment upon the case; and, after due deliberation, unanimously judged that the way was clear for granting the petition from the congregation of Elizabethtown, to have the pastoral relation between Mr. Austin and said congregation dissolved, and did accordingly dissolve it, and hereby declare the congregation vacant.

“With respect to Mr. Austin’s declaration of his having withdrawn from his connection with this Presbytery, and from all Presbyterial connection and government, they also unanimously declare that they are sensibly and tenderly affected upon the occasion, and sincerely lament the unhappy circumstances which have led to these measures. And whilst it is their wish to treat Mr. Austin’s person and character with all possible delicacy and tenderness, and whilst they declare that they have nothing to allege against his moral character, yet as they are clearly of opinion that Mr. Austin is, and has, for more than a year past, been under the powerful influence of enthusiasm and delusion, evidently manifested by his giving credit to, and being guided by, supposed revelations and communications of an extraordinary kind; his alleged designation and call to particular important offices and services; his undertaking to fix the precise time of the commencement of the millennium to the fifteenth day of May last, and to designate the circumstances of its commencement; and his present declaration of his intentions to institute a new church, and to set up a new order of things in ecclesiastical concerns; and his having persisted and still persisting in similar views and conduct, notwithstanding his having been faithfully and tenderly dealt with on this head by the Presbytery, in an extra judicial capacity as well as by individual members,—the Presbytery having taken these things into consideration, feel themselves bound, in justice to the Church of Christ in general, and particularly to the congregations under their care, to declare that they cannot recommend Mr. Austin as one who, whilst under the influence of this enthusiasm and delusion, promises usefulness in the service of the Gospel ministry; but, on the contrary, feel it to be their duty solemnly to caution all against giving heed to any irrational and unscriptural suggestions and impressions, as delusions of Satan, the effects of a disordered imagination, tending to mislead, deceive, and destroy the souls of men, and to affect the union, the peace, and the harmony of the Church of Christ.”

After his removal by the Presbytery from his congregation, Mr. Austin preached in the surrounding country for a short time, and then returned to



New Haven. Believing in the literal return of the Jews to the Holy Land, and that New Haven was to be the place of their embarkation from this country, he erected houses and a wharf for their use. Unable to pay the debts he incurred, he was imprisoned for some time. During his confinement, his mind seemed in some measure to recover itself; but yet, on the subject of prophecy, was distracted. He returned to this town in 1804, when, being refused admission to his old pulpit, subscriptions were circulated for putting the Methodist church into a state of repair for his use. The object was obtained; and he preached there for a short time, but the state of his mind now became obvious to all; his friends could no longer encourage him, and he again returned to New England. His mind gradually emerged from the cloud that obscured it; and he again entered upon a career of usefulness. His excellent wife, possessed of an ample patrimony, exerted a most happy influence upon him, and greatly aided in restoring his mind to its former balance. For a number of years he preached in vacant churches in the Eastern part of Connecticut. In 1815, he received a call from the church in Bozrah, where he was installed on the ninth of May of that year. Here he preached regularly and with great acceptance and success, until his death, which took place at Norwich, February 5, 1831, in the seventy-second year of his age.

Mr. Austin was decidedly one of the most popular preachers of his day. Up to the time of his great affliction, no man could be more universally beloved and admired. Dignified in personal appearance, polished in manners, eloquent in his public performances, and prompt to meet every demand that was made upon his ample fortune, he exerted a commanding influence not only over his own congregation, but also over many of the leading minds of his day. His memory was retentive and his conversational powers extraordinary. His devotional exercises were peculiarly happy and impressive; and all who remember him testify that few have ever surpassed him in public prayer. Besides performing a great amount of pastoral labour, he rendered good service to the theological literature of his country. He edited and published a Commentary upon the Bible, and some of President Edwards' most valuable works; and also a series of original Sermons in four volumes, by distinguished living ministers, under the title of the "American Preacher." In addition to these, he published *The Millennium, or the thousand years of prosperity promised to the Church of God, in the Old Testament and the New, shortly to commence and to be carried on to perfection, under the auspices of Him, who, in the vision, was presented to St. John, 1794; Prophetic leaf containing an illustration of the signs of the times, 1798; a Discourse at East Windsor on the 4th of July, 1799; a Sermon entitled "Masonry in its glory," 1799; a Sermon on the death of Washington, 1800; The Dawn of Day introductory to the Rising Sun: in nine Letters, 1801; Proclamation for the Millennial Empire, (folio sheet) 1805; a Sermon at the dedication of the new meeting-house, Bozrah, 1815.*

Ever affectionately yours,

NICHOLAS MURRAY.

FROM THE REV. ABEL McEWEN, D. D.

NEW LONDON, December 25, 1849.

Dear Sir: My acquaintance with the Rev. David Austin commenced when I was a member of Yale College, in the year 1800,—twenty-one years after he graduated at that institution. It was during a season, which, to him, was one of excitement and perplexity. He had been a highly respectable and popular clergyman in New Jersey. By embracing and avowing the doctrine of the Second Advent of Christ, he had brought himself into disrepute and trouble. He was not a man to be satisfied with the mere theory of any thing religious. His speculations upon any thing usually carried him into action. Having appointed the day and the place for the descent of the Lord Jesus, he drew together thousands of people to see the sight. But there was no descent, except that of Mr. Austin. He fell from the dignity of a prophet into the mortifying condition of a man who had made a great mistake. Soon he was dismissed from the pastoral office; and the Presbytery, instead of recommending him to the churches, formally declared their conviction that he was under a deep delusion.

He retired to New Haven, his native place, and engaged in the building of expensive houses and stores. To inquiries concerning his design, he seriously, or what is more probable, facetiously, replied, that the large stores were to be a place of deposit for the goods of the Jews in this country, who were to assemble in New Haven, and thence go to Jerusalem to meet the Son of David, who was soon to reappear. In a manner more comic than otherwise, he still maintained that the personal reign of Christ on earth was soon to commence. The making of turnpike roads—then a work in its incipient movements, was a fulfilment of prophecy, ushering in the millennium, when every mountain was to be brought low, every valley to be exalted, and the rough places to be made smooth.

This enterprise of building involved him in pecuniary embarrassments. His own ample estate, and not a little of the property of his wealthy relatives, were engulfed in this disaster. His conduct, at this period, was so erratic that many people regarded him insane. Others, and those who, early in life, were his intimate associates, ascribed the peculiarities which he developed to a mental constitution as unlike that of ordinary men as his conduct was wide from their's. For my own satisfaction, I enquired particularly of an intelligent gentleman, conversant with Mr. Austin, while they were boys and young men, whether he was, or was not, insane. His reply was, "No more insane than he has been from infancy; he never was like other folks. He was always brilliant, eccentric, and humorous. Exciting occurrences and scenes always operated upon his strange mind to make him do what no one else would do, or think of doing." Years after this question was put, and thus answered, Mr. Austin and I had become resident in the county of New London, where his deportment, though more chastened than it was in the early years of my observation upon him, was sufficiently peculiar to keep up the question whether he were sane. Dr. Benedict, then of Plainfield, though formerly of Lisbon, spoke of his acquaintance with Mr. Austin, when he was a young preacher, and was visiting the lady in Norwich, who became his wife. I asked how he was then. Said Dr. Benedict, "Oh he was Mr. Austin. I lived in Newent; to a meeting of ministers at my house he came with a gentleman from Norwich. One of my most respectable parishioners, Mr. Kinsman, applied for Mr. Austin as a guest. At the close of the evening, I billeted him accordingly, with his most hearty approbation. In the morning, at break of day, the weather exceedingly cold, on my way to the barn, I met Mr. Austin; his fine blue cloak was covered with hay, and I said, 'Mr. Austin, I believe you slept in the barn.' 'Verily I did, Sir,' was his reply."

After his return from Elizabethtown to New Haven, his embarrassments there brought him, for a little while, into the debtor's jail. Having, as the term of



enlargement then was, "the liberty of the yard," he amused himself by sitting on the piazza of the County House, and having his servant bring his elegant pair of horses daily for him to look at and caress. One afternoon of Saturday as he was playing with the horses, he mounted one, and was soon out of sight upon the Hartford road. The Sheriff issued a reward of fifty dollars for his apprehension. Two men started in pursuit. They followed him through Hartford, and overtook him at Lebanon, just as he was entering the meeting-house of Mr. Ely, his classmate, in the afternoon. Mr. Austin made his way directly into the pulpit; his pursuers took a pew below. "Brother Ely," said he "I want to preach." "No, Mr. Austin," said Mr. Ely, "I must preach myself: my sermon is to have connection with the one which I delivered in the morning; I cannot let you preach." "Very well," Mr. Austin replied, "preach, if you must, but I shall preach too;" and forthwith he took the desk and named his text—"Whither I go, ye cannot come." After preaching a discourse appropriate to his pursuers, he came down and with good grace surrendered himself. The two men mounting him on one of their jaded horses, brought him down through New London. He complained that the gait of the animal was unpleasant, and that he rode uncomfortably. After they had crossed the ferry at Saybrook, "Now," said he "gentlemen, you have the river behind you; let me ride my own horse." They granted the indulgence. Mounted on his courser, and getting the length of him ahead, he cheered them with a "good-bye, gentlemen," and was quickly out of sight. Taking the first turn to the right, he made great headway for a while, when, arriving at a tavern, he dashed off to quench his thirst. On the table lay the advertisement, "Fifty dollars reward for David Austin, a debtor, who escaped from the jail in New Haven." Seizing the paper, he bent his course with all speed to the city, presented himself to the Sheriff, before the arrival of his escort, and demanded the reward.

He was soon relieved from duress; and he manifested a strong inclination to resume preaching; but, on account of his recent irregularities, and the equivocal relation he sustained to his Presbytery, his domestic friends and his clerical brethren discouraged, and, as far as they could, prevented him. He could not brook the prohibition, and he turned Baptist, and was immersed, that he might preach where he could, as it was difficult to do it where he would. Journeying about, he found a vacant Baptist church in the county of Windham, whose pulpit he engaged to occupy for a Sabbath. This church embraced the opportunity to celebrate the ordinance of the Lord's Supper. As Mr. Austin rose to commence the sacramental service, a deacon of the church stepped up, and asked whether he were an open or a close communionist. This was an unlooked for question. Unwilling to be caught in his own trap, he said he was an open communionist. This information fell like a frost upon the deacon and the church. The administrator was a man of expedients; but no arguments which he could use, convinced his brethren that it was right for them to receive the ordinance at his hands. In the kindness of his heart, for which he was always remarkable, he proposed to administer the elements, but himself to refrain from partaking them. To this they agreed. When he had closed the service, with great meekness and solemnity, he rose up and said, "Though it be not meet to take the children's bread and to cast it to the dogs, yet the dogs may eat of the crumbs that fall from their master's table." He then helped himself to his share of the remains, and retired, in a triumph of his own sort, from the scene.

His new religious association was not congenial to his taste and former habits; and without a formal abdication, or any dismissal from the Baptists, he betook himself, practically, to the Congregationalists. The clergy of this denomination, and his relatives and friends, shut the door, as far as possible, to his preaching. Restless, and fertile in expedients for finding opportunities, he would occasionally hold forth to some sort of an audience. In this state of things, I asked him

whether he preached much now-a-days. "Not much," he replied; "now and then, I go up to Wallingford, and from Brother Noyes' three-decker, give them off a few broad-sides. Perhaps I may take a political swath about the State."

He was *domiciled* with his Uncle Street,\* the aged pastor of the church in East Haven. He issued an advertisement in the newspapers, that on a particular evening named, "an Oration, on the Conquest of Canaan, would be delivered in the Stone Chapel, across the brook Kidron, three miles east of the city of Jerusalem, by David Austin." Just at this time, the Phi Beta Kappa Society of Yale College inserted an advertisement that Dr. Eli Ives, lately returned from the Medical Institution in Philadelphia, would deliver an oration on the then new subject of Chemistry in the Centre Church in New Haven, on an evening which fell out to be the same which Mr. Austin had designated for his exhibition. Whereupon, Mr. Austin changed his advertisement in the next edition of it, appointing time and place identical with those for the proposed exercise of Dr. Ives. Mr. Austin was asked what his design was in taking the subject which he had selected for his oration. Said he, "I have found by my reading that none of the poets in the ages past have gained much attention from the public, until some subsequent orator took up the subject of the poem and commended it to the attention of the people; and," he added, "I am inclined to do a favour of this sort to one of my distinguished contemporaries."† The evening for the two orations came. The Centre Church was filled with people. Dr. Dana, the pastor, with the orator and officers of the Phi Beta Kappa Society, occupied the pulpit and filled the seat. At this instant, the stately and comely figure of Mr. Austin, dressed in a suit of clergy grey, cut and trimmed somewhat in the fashion of a military undress, was seen moving with dignity and grace up the middle aisle. Without hesitation, he laid his course up the pulpit stairs, and with benignity and assurance looked a reception among the dignitaries of the occasion. However, as the door was not opened, he bowed his retirement down stairs, and, with composure well displayed, took a chair at the foot of them. At the instant the oration was closed, he began to reascend; but Dr. Dana having the hats ready, the cavalcade of officials met the aspirant for the second speech midway, and he civilly gave place. But, the steps cleared for him, he appeared, without loss of time, in the desk, and with winning face and voice said,—“I have given public notice that an oration would be delivered here this evening; perhaps, however, the occasion may be better employed by preaching. We have had a little treat of Chemistry—if you please, we will try our hand to a small experiment in spiritual Chemistry. After ten minutes, if you will be in your seats, I will preach a sermon.” Seeing the multitude beginning to move, he exclaimed, “If you will drop into your positions to hear, I will commence the services immediately. Not to be tedious, we may as well dispense with the pleasant services of prayer and singing, and enter at once upon the sermon. Forthwith he gave out his text: I Kings, VII, 25,—“It stood upon twelve oxen; three looking toward the North; and three looking toward the West; and three looking toward the South; and three looking toward the East; and the sea was set above them; and all their hinder parts were inward.” In his introductory remarks, he described the speaker:—“I am the last charge, shot out of that great gun of the Gospel, Dr. Bellamy.” Here followed a detail of the theological tenets inculcated upon his mind by that revered instructor. The last doctrine in the series he stated. “*That*,” said he, “I did not get from Dr. Bellamy, but it was communicated to me when at Elizabethtown, by the Rev. gentleman who lately occupied the seat at my right hand; and had he had permanency of soul enough to remain

\* NICHOLAS STREET was a son of the Rev. Samuel Street, (by his third wife, Hannah Glover,) of Wallingford, Conn.; was graduated at Yale College in 1751; was ordained pastor of the church in East Haven, October 8, 1755; and died October 3, 1806, in the seventy-seventh year of his age. He was distinguished for prudence, benevolence, and godly sincerity.

† Dr. Dwight.

in his seat until now, I should have paid him a handsome compliment." This last touch of facetiousness excited laughter in some of the auditors. A pious old Welsh lady, in the pew where I was, enquired, "Is this preaching?"

The preacher then entered upon the subject of his text. "This brazen sea upon the backs of the twelve oxen, we may regard as a great mirror,—the Atlantic Ocean, if you please—Empire and Science, Literature and the Arts, Civilization and Liberty, civil and religious, have travelled from the East to the West. From the West to the East, they, vastly improved, shall travel back. Yes," said he, casting his eyes up to the boys of the College, "if my recollection of Optics serves me, the angle of incidence is just equal to the angle of reflection. Light has come from the Alps and the Appenines, struck the great mirror and glanced upon our Alleghanies and Andes; from them, with tenfold brightness, it shall glance back again upon the European glaciers." After this flight and many others like it, he rounded off his discourse upon spiritual Chemistry by saying,—“I understand that the Society have gone over to the Court House to eat some bread and cheese, and perhaps we cannot do better than to follow them.—Amen.”

A procession of such members of this Literary Society as had remained to hear him, led by him, repaired to the Court House. He took his seat among the dignitaries; and, made, by the excitement of the occasion, unusually sprightly and voluble even for him, he electrified the assembly by his conversation. In the midst of his torrent of drollery, a coloured man advanced with a waiter of wine. "Stop, stop," said Mr. Austin, "behold, Ethiopia stretcheth forth her hands." The gentlemen took off each his glass. "Mr. Austin," said Mr. Goodrich, the President of the Society, "we will wait on you for a toast." "No Sir," was the reply. Judge Daggett repeated the President's request, but got the same answer. "Yes," said Dr. Dana, "Mr. Austin, give us a toast—you are one of the orators of the evening." Instantly, David raised his glass and said, "Dr. Dana, the shadow of good things to come."\*

Mr. Austin was a good classical scholar, never lacking words in his mother tongue, whether speaking in a public harangue or in private conversation. In all mass-meetings and literary gatherings his presence was sure to be known, for he never failed to be one of the speakers, nor to throw a handful of his spice into the entertainment. He was never appointed or called to such services; but was always tolerated in them. One of the voluntaries on all occasions,—had he been asked for whom or by what authority he appeared, he would have replied, as the Yankee did, when, in the battle at West Point, he was asked to what company he belonged, and answered that he was acting on his own hook.

Mr. Austin was remarkable for conceits, sudden, sometimes trivial, sometimes sublime, always amusing. I once fell in with him on the road. As we were crossing Saybrook ferry, he looked up the Connecticut and said, "A noble river, Sir." "Yes," I replied, "a very long river for the size of it." "Yes," said he,—“suppose it to be a tree;” and stepping one foot forward, as though he were grasping the trunk, he added, "raise it up here,—what a tree it would be! two hundred miles high! the towns on the branches would be the leaves; the meeting houses would be the birds' nests; and" (hitting me a rap) "we ministers should be the birds' eggs."

After residing a while at New Haven, he removed to Norwich, the native place of his wife, whose deceased father had made ample provision for their support. His itch to preach, inveterate, incurable, worried him. He still laboured under embarrassment from his peculiar relations to his Presbytery. He respected their vote much less than the Congregational clergy of New London County did; who were reluctant to admit him to perform within their precincts, services which they regarded as at least of a questionable character. At length, however, he had an application to preach, a few Sabbaths, to a little congregation near Col-

\* The reference was to Dr. Dana's thin and almost ghostly appearance.

chester. Mr. Cone\* of Colchester, not averse to help, with some stretch of kindness toward Mr. Austin, let him preach once or twice for him. One afternoon, as Mr. Cone was sitting, oppressed with a hypochondriacal affection, he observed an unusual movement of his parishioners along the streets, and of his family he enquired the occasion of this movement. No one could inform him. Just then Mr. Austin came dashing up on his high-mettled steed, and suddenly entered the house. "What," said Mr. Cone, "is this movement of the people?" "A lecture," was the reply. "Lecture! I have not appointed one," said Mr. Cone. "No," replied Mr. Austin, "I appointed it." "How is this?"—answered the indignant pastor—"appoint lectures in my parish without consulting me?" With all meekness and benignity, the interloper replied, "Brother Cone, don't be angry; I confess it is a little irregular; but the pigeons are down; let us spring the net upon them."

As Mr. Austin had never been actually suspended by his Presbytery, and as he had so far recovered from his mental malady, that it was thought he might be useful in the ministry, he was set apart as the pastor of a Congregational church in Bozrah, though he still resided at Norwich. Having preached at Norwich myself a Sabbath,—Monday morning, agreeably to invitation, I called in to see him. Having introduced me to his wife and her mother, after some conversation, he said, "Well, ladies, if you think you have seen Mr. McEwen long enough to know him next time, he and I will go out to the office." We went out to the counting-room of a store, which he had fitted up in rather fantastic style for his study. I remarked that he had a good room and that all his accommodations were pleasant. His reply was in character:—"The will of the old gentleman was an injunction upon his sons to give Mrs. Austin and myself a respectable livelihood. Well worded—a respectable livelihood—what is it? Why, good table-fare every day, money in pocket, good horse and chaise, five horse-whips; namely—one for each of us, lady and gentleman, when we take saddles; one for the chaise, a long one to touch the leader if we should have one, and old Jack's with a wooden handle, hanging up in the stable, worth more than all the rest. Yes, this study is very well. Here I sit and try to think; been at it this morning. One text came into my mind—'The world, the flesh, and the devil.' Could not get rid of it. Well, I thought I would see what I could make out of it—a very convenient text for some folks. They say, 'we must conform to the world.' Then the flesh,—we are made as we are, and cannot be much to blame for taking a natural course; what the world and the flesh don't take, the devil must: so they think they have got rid of all guilt. But the trouble is, it will all come back again: for think of it; 'the world, the flesh, and the devil'—every man has a good deal of this trinity in him."

Taking the oversight of his charge in Bozrah, and, nothing loath, acting often as its minister of exterior relations, he one day came to a wealthy man in Norwich, and said,—“Mr. Spaulding, Bozrah people have taken it into their heads to paint Bozrah meeting-house; and they lack money; and when we lack money, Sir, we know not what to do but to go where money is.” “One thing more, Mr. Austin, is important,” said the rich man; “not only must you go where money is, but to those who are willing to give—I am not willing to give money to paint Bozrah meeting-house.” “Very well,” said the applicant, “no harm done, I trust. What would you advise then, Mr. Spaulding?” “Why, Sir, I advise you to go down to Judge Perkins of New-London; he, it is said, is now the great patron of meeting-houses.” “A good thought,” said Mr. Austin,—“I go.” He mounted his horse and rode with his usual rapidity towards New London. About half-way, he met Judge Perkins and another gentleman in a carriage. Raising

\* SALMON CONE was a native of Bolton, Conn.; was graduated at Yale College in 1789; was ordained pastor of the First church in Colchester, February 29, 1792; was dismissed August 11, 1830; afterwards preached for some time as a stated supply in the neighbouring parish of Goshen, and died March 24, 1834.



himself in the stirrups, extending his hand, and electrifying his whole figure with surprise and joy, the horseman exclaimed,—“A kind providence—the very man I was after.” “What now, Mr. Austin?”—said the Judge. “Why, Sir, Bozrah people have undertaken to paint Bozrah meeting-house; and they lack money; and when we lack money, we know not what to do, but to go where money is, and ” (raising his hand with earnest gesticulation) “now Sir, I want you to give me one hundred dollars.” “No, no,” said the Judge, “Mr. Austin, I won’t give you but forty.” “Done, I take it,” said Mr. Austin, ratifying the treaty by smiting his hands together with a cheering rap. In narrating the occurrences afterwards, the Judge laughed heartily, saying, “I should not have given him more than ten dollars, but he levied on me so high and suddenly, I thought I could not get off under forty.”

A house for public worship was to be dedicated in Stonington. The clergy of the neighbourhood were called in. Mr. Austin and myself were assigned to the bountiful hospitality of General Williams. In the evening, conversation passed concerning our host’s dairy of seventy cows, and his whaling ships then at sea. All this told upon the peculiar susceptibility of my companion. We were put for lodging into a large chamber, a bed at each end. His habit was to soliloquize in the morning, and as the light of the breaking day revealed objects of nature, to address them, mingling ejaculations to God with his sayings to creatures. Very early, I heard him engaged in such exercises. When he thought it light enough to make conversation civil, he directed his loquacity to me. “Sir, in this whaling business there is a magnificent consistency.” The reply to this early and well-studied proposition was, “I hear your statement, Sir, how do you make out the truth of it?” “Why, in the first place,” said he, “whales are great fish; secondly, they live in great oceans; thirdly, great ships are sent to take them; fourthly, great pots are used to try out the oil; and fifthly, great casks to put the oil in—I say, Sir, that in this business there is a magnificent consistency.” He came to a window near me, and, looking out upon a wall of great height and length, and composed of very heavy stones, and looking also upon the highway, originally rough, but made smooth by great labour, he said,—“This man who has given us beds and black-fish, is no ordinary chap.” “No,” I replied, “he is a thorough man.” “Last year,” resumed Mr. Austin, “I came along here when he was doing this work. I told him he was a sort of terrestrial missionary. Transitions will occur. He has become now very nearly a celestial missionary; he has built him a church. No miracle neither: for

“Whales in the sea  
“God’s voice obey.”

Mr. Austin manifestly felt deep regret for the calamities which he had brought upon some of his friends, by depriving them of property. Particularly, he laboured to comfort a brother, who, by being surety for him, had incurred great loss. After the death of Mrs. Austin, he compromised with her brothers, to receive, during his natural life, instead of the “respectable livelihood,” four hundred dollars *per annum*. With this and his small salary from Bozrah, he was able to aid his brother, whose family was very large. He purchased a house in Norwich, settled his brother with himself in it, helped him into business, and as David had no children of his own, he adopted those of his brother, without taking them from their natural parents.

At Bozrah he is remembered with much affection. His ministry there, though not a very well-regulated one, the people speak of with interest. He was well bred; he had seen much of the world; he had an overflowing kindness of soul—why should he not do ten thousand things to please his people?

While prosecuting that ministry, he attended all convocations of the Congregational clergy in the country, and to them he reported much of his projects and doings as a pastor. He was often admonished that his measures were ill advised;



for them he was sometimes rebuked. One thing was always remarkable—he took advice with humility, and rebuke with meekness, from his brethren, even from the youngest and the most insignificant of them. He had little power for discussion; for his unruly and unmanageable imagination destroyed all method, and to any great extent, all consecutive thought. But he would always pray with fervour and with adaptedness of sentiment and language to the occasion. To prevent a speech his brethren often requested him to pray.

He closed life unusually well. Nearly a year before his death, his health began to decline. His forwardness, his eccentricity, his extravagance, his drollery, were all laid aside. An increasing simplicity and gentleness, with brotherly love and faith, characterized him the residue of his days. In life, he had commanded great attention; in his decline and death, he awakened great interest in the hearts of his Christian friends.

With the above sketch of a very extraordinary man, accept assurance of great respect from your humble servant,

ABEL McEWEN.

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## REUBEN PUFFER, D. D.

1781—1829.

FROM THE REV. WILLIAM A. HOUGHTON.

NORTHBOROUGH, Mass., August 27, 1850.

Dear Sir: By request of Madam Puffer, widow of the late Dr. Puffer of Berlin, I transmit to you the following brief sketch of his life.

REUBEN PUFFER was the son of Jabez and Hannah Puffer, of Sudbury, Mass., where he was born, January 7, 1756. His father was a farmer in the middle walks of life. He lost his mother when he was about nine years old. No particular incidents or characteristics of his childhood are preserved, except a remarkable application to intellectual pursuits. He fitted for College under the instruction of the Rev. Samuel Woodward of Weston. He became a member of Harvard College in 1774, and graduated in 1778. After his graduation, he taught a school, for a short time, in East Sudbury, now Wayland. He prosecuted his theological studies chiefly under the direction of the Rev. Elisha Fish of Upton. His earliest ministerial labours were the first enjoyed by the South parish in Bolton, now Berlin. From this parish he soon received a call to the pastoral office; and having accepted it in June, 1781, he was ordained on the 26th of September following. He united with the church, at the same time, by letter from the church in Sudbury. The meeting-house not then being completed, the ordination services were held under a tree, which is still standing near the church. The ordination sermon was preached by the Rev. Jacob Bigelow\* of Sudbury.

The degree of Doctor of Divinity was conferred upon him by Harvard University, in the year 1810.

\* JACOB BIGELOW was born at Waltham, March 2, 1743; was graduated at Harvard College in 1766; was ordained pastor of the church in Sudbury, Mass., November 11, 1772; and died September, 1816, in his seventy-fourth year.