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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.

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BY WILLIAM B. SPRAGUE, D. D.

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VOLUME IV.
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NEW YORK:
ROBERT CARTER & BROTHERS,
530 BROADWAY.
1858.

Entered according to Act of Congress, in the year 1856.

By ROBERT CARTER & BROTHERS,

In the Clerk's Office of the District Court of the United States for the Southern
District of New York.

cal controversy, that was then beginning to show itself, and was jealous of all innovations upon the standards of his Church, in their fair and legitimate construction.

Very fraternally yours,

B. GILDERSLEEVE.

MATTHIAS BRUEN.*

1816—1829.

MATTHIAS BRUEN, son of Matthias and Hannah (Coe) Bruen, was of Puritan extraction,—his remote ancestors having been among the early settlers of New England. His family, for several generations, had resided in Newark, N. J., where he was born, April 11, 1793. He was favoured with a religious education, and, from his earliest years, manifested an unusual tenderness of conscience; but it was not till he was in his eighteenth year, that he considered himself as having entered decidedly on the religious life. He evinced, even from childhood, an uncommon fondness for books; and when he was only six years old, would sometimes lock himself into a room, that he might not be disturbed in his reading. At the age of eight, he went to live with his paternal grandfather, and continued with him till he had reached his fifteenth year, and had become fitted for College. He entered Columbia College in the city of New York, in 1808, and was graduated with high honour in 1812. Shortly after, he joined the Theological Seminary in New York, of which Dr. J. M. Mason was at the head, and passed through the regular course of studies prescribed in that institution. He was licensed to preach by the Classis of New York on the 2d of July, 1816, and was received as a member of the Classis on the 19th of October, 1819. His relation was transferred to the Presbytery of New York on the 15th of April, 1823.

In the year 1812, he was visited with a severe illness, which gave a shock to his constitution, the effects of which were felt during several subsequent years. It was partly, though not entirely, with a view to the establishment of his health, that, soon after he was licensed to preach, he resolved to devote some time to foreign travel; and, accordingly, in the summer of 1816, he crossed the ocean in company with his honoured teacher and friend, the Rev. Dr. Mason. In regard to this important step he writes thus:—"With every means of pursuing my inquiries, and the most flattering prospects, may I never forget that they form the standard of my responsibility. While I am, for a time, relieved from the pressure of public labour, may it be for some better purpose than to satisfy an idle curiosity or an empty ambition."

Having passed two years and a half in travelling in different European countries, during which time he formed an acquaintance with many of the most eminent men of the age, he was on the eve of embarking at Liverpool for his native country, when he received an urgent invitation, to preach in the American Chapel of the Oratory in Paris. Having accepted this

* Obituary notices.—Memoir by Mrs. Lundie.

invitation, he received ordination in London on the 4th of November, 1818, with special reference to his new field. After labouring six months in Paris, he returned to the United States, and reached New York in June, 1819. Circumstances led him to revisit Great Britain in January, 1821. He remained chiefly with his friends in Scotland till the close of the succeeding April, when he again left them to return to his native country. He reached New York on the 11th of June, having made his homeward passage in the ill fated *Albion*, which, the next year, was wrecked on the British coast, and in which a large number, and among them the lamented Professor Fisher of Yale College, perished.

After his second return from Europe, he was occupied in preaching in various places,—chiefly, however, in the city of New York; and in connection with his other labours, he prepared for the press a little volume, entitled “*Essays descriptive and moral of scenes in Italy and France, by an American.*” The work was printed in Edinburgh, but a part of the impression was sent to New York. It is of a somewhat fragmentary character, but bears decided marks of taste and genius.

In November, 1822, Mr. Bruen was employed as a missionary in the city of New York, by a Committee of Missions appointed by the Presbytery; and, as the result of his ministrations, the Bleecker Street Congregation was collected, and on the 22d of April, 1825, was formally organized by a Committee of Presbytery appointed for the purpose. Of this Congregation he was installed Pastor on the 14th of June following; and here he was privileged to continue his very acceptable labours till within a few days of his death.

In January, 1823, Mr. Bruen was united in marriage with Mary Ann, daughter of the Hon. James Davenport, of Stamford, who, with two daughters, of which she became the mother, survived him.

Mr. Bruen, during the infancy of his congregation, and with a view to increase his usefulness to the utmost, accepted the appointment of Agent and Corresponding Secretary of the United Domestic Missionary Society. In this capacity his labours were highly appreciated by the religious community, and they had no small influence in giving existence to the American Home Missionary Society in which the other was subsequently merged. He held this office for about eighteen months, and then resigned it, that he might give a less divided attention to his pastoral charge. He, however, remained a member of the Executive Committee of the National Institution, and in various ways lent an efficient aid to the promotion of its interests. The last public official duty which he ever performed was the delivery of a charge at Woodbury, Conn., to several young men who were ordained with special reference to Western missions.

It was when the prospects of his usefulness had become the brightest, that his career was abruptly terminated by death. From Woodbury, where he performed his last public service, he returned to New York, with the expectation of occupying his own pulpit on the following Sabbath. He did enter the pulpit, and commenced the service, but found himself under the power of a violent disease, and was obliged to call upon a clerical brother present to go through the usual exercises. From that time, his sufferings were excruciating and almost unintermitted; and it soon became manifest that, unless he were the subject of some extraordinary interposition, his disease must have a fatal issue. When he awoke to the conviction that he

was about to pass to the eternal world, he said;—"God is coming in darkness: Lord, have mercy on my soul." But this temporary agitation of spirit quickly yielded to a calm and childlike trust in the wisdom and goodness of God; and as long as he retained the ability to speak, he continued to utter words of devout resignation, of affectionate counsel, of fervent prayer. Not only his family and immediate friends, but his Congregation, the Missionary Society, and the interests of Christ's Kingdom at large, received from him all the attention in his last hours which it was possible for a dying man to give. With perfect tranquillity he took leave of all things earthly, and entered into his rest on the morning of the Lord's day, September 6, 1829, in the thirty-seventh year of his age. The Rev. Dr. Skinner of Philadelphia, and the Rev. Dr. Cox of New York, both preached Sermons in reference to his death, which were published.

Besides the work already referred to, Mr. Bruen published a Sermon on taking leave of his congregation in Paris, in 1819, and a Thanksgiving Sermon preached at Woodbridge, N. J., in 1821. He was also a liberal contributor to various periodicals.

In 1831, there was published a memoir of Mr. Bruen, which, though anonymous, is understood to have been written by a lady in Scotland, who has since become well known in the walks of Christian literature.

FROM THE REV. SAMUEL H. COX, D. D.

RUS URBAN, Brooklyn, 19th August, 1850.

Honoured and dear Brother: I trace a very defective sketch or outline, in some aspects of my theme, that may, I hope, do no injustice to an honoured name and a precious memory, and consign it to you for a place in your interesting gallery of American clerical portraits. It is now twenty-one years since I preached the Funeral Sermon of our lamented Bruen; and it seems like a dream of the night. The Master took him as a star from the candlestick, to shine in the firmament of the new creation. May we meet him in Heaven; and by reflection bright, shine with him there to the glory of that uncreated light of the Lamb, which makes all other radiance retire unseen.

"There entertain him all the saints above,
 "In solemn troops, and sweet societies,
 "That sing, and singing in their glory move—
 "And wipe the tears forever from his eyes."

But let us recur to what he was,—to what he seemed,—when with us in this world. His form, his manners, his living character, his unfeigned originality and unobtrusive independence, I love to recollect, as they "gave the world assurance of a man."

He was a person of medium size, symmetrical, of an air elegant and sometimes princely, and all his manners imported no ordinary man. His natural parts were sound and serviceable, his taste exquisite, his education, especially as improved by foreign travel, was quite excellent, and his entire character worthy of the high esteem it every where conciliated,—more remarkably among the enlightened, the elevated and the good. The estimate of such persons, as Dr. John Pye Smith, Robert Hall, John Foster, Robert Lundie, and Hannah More, to say nothing of the first names at home, may put the superiority of his character into bold and credible relief before all men.

As a preacher, however, what shall I say of him? Few of his cotemporaries could enter the sacred desk with more theological wealth, discrimination of truth, general reading, or sincere desire to be useful. And he *was* useful. By him the pulpit was graced with rich and ripe preparation of the Gospel

of peace. No scholar could hear and not honour such a preacher; no Christian, and not love him. There were scriptural truth, piety, sagacity, learning, sincerity, polish, taste and beauty, all combined; and yet something seemed wanting. Instead of characterizing it in words, I will relate the following anecdote which may serve for illustration not only, but also to evince Bruen's just and even rigid comprehension of himself. In a pleasant and confiding colloquy with a co-presbyter on the subject of preaching, and the immense and appalling difficulties attending its full and complete exemplification, as so much above the ordinary powers of human nature, said the latter,—“O, Bruen, I almost fear to preach in your presence, when I remember, as I can never forget, the comparative inferiority of my education, and the rare excellence of your own, in so many ways accomplished and accomplishing its possessor.” “Hush,” he rejoined, “I cannot affect an audience as I ought, and as others can. It is out of my power to arrest them, to hold their attention, to impress their feelings, to make them sympathize with me in what I preach, and to influence them either to go home to the Bible and the closet, or to come again and hear me, with gratified, and above all, with edified, desire. Could I do this, it would be more than all that I aim, or hope ever to do. Others do it; and those I know whose education has not been equal to mine. But could I possess such a gift, and use it well to the glory of our blessed Master, I should consider it as paramount to any thing else this side the world of glory. But I have it not, and you have. Pray be content, and be grateful, and be faithful too forever!” Possibly, indeed, he disparaged his official gifts. His judgment of his own public appearances seems always to have been severe—so much so as to discourage him. His own mind, alive in a remarkable degree to the animating power of eloquence, formed an ideal excellence which he could never attain.

In respect to popular effect, and the best ordinary results of preaching, it must be conceded that there was a deficiency. The tone of his voice was not full and commanding. There appeared a want of power in the manner, and also a consciousness of some quality which should prevent success. There was a fineness of appearance, a sentimentality, and a cultivation, and a superiority about him, which, though regretted and resisted, rather than affected or desired, still characterized him to the people, and thence alienated them at large from that social oneness and sacred sympathy with the preacher, without which the proper traits of his ministrations are not ordinarily realized. Hence he was not popular, in the common acceptance of the word, with the masses; nor was he properly appreciated by them. His very style was so terse, so correct, so chastened, so scholastic, also tasteful and ornate, as to be less directly effective or acceptable to the many, especially at first. It was to his honour, and it might have been for his encouragement, that he gained on his hearers. At first they were not specially taken. Next time they thought better of him. At last they began to think there was more in him and more of him than they had supposed. His own people, however, who knew him out of the pulpit as well as in it, loved him with rich and rare affection. They accredited his worth, and they felt as well as knew it. Their esteem was ever growing and powerful. They were all cordially united in him. He had their entire confidence. That he was truly a good man, there lived not one of them to doubt. That he was well informed, wise, and reasonable in all his ways; that he knew what he was about, and was always about it; that he was a practically devoted pastor, a sincere servant of the Lord Jesus Christ, and an enlightened counsellor, caring always for the true interests of his people, and that every way and increasingly he was entitled to their confidence, and as copiously enjoying it too, was their common sentiment and conviction; and they loved him more and more till they wept at his funeral.

To the last years of his brief but brilliant life, he lived fast for the time. He grew, matured, and became more extensively related and ready to every good

work. His correspondence was large, and his influence ever widening its circle, so as to be retained in neither hemisphere alone. As his character became better and more understood, the public estimate of his worth proportionally ripened and consolidated. He continually and yet gradually ascended, till, on an honoured eminence, with more elevated prospects before him, he was suddenly removed from the scenes of this world.

Your friend and brother in the Gospel of our common Lord,

S. H. COX.

FROM MRS. M. G. L. DUNCAN.

EDINBURGH, July 1, 1851.

Rev. and dear Sir: The request you have made leads to the revision of twelve years—a task involving many a revived remembrance, and awakening many a sleeping association. But though the revision of a voluminous correspondence sets before me the mind and action of my ever honoured friend, as clearly as if twenty years had not intervened since our earthly communings ceased, it is not easy to place before you what is so brightly mirrored to me. In truth, the memoir of the Rev. Matthias Bruen, to which you so kindly refer, contains all that at the time it seemed expedient to give to the public,—so that I can have little more to say on the subject. It was but a section of his life that came within my range of vision—it is for his fellow-workers, such as my friend Dr. Cox, to delineate the ardent zeal, the abundant labour, and the consistent walk, which they saw, shared, and cheered with their sympathies.

His path, as that of the just must ever do, shined “more and more unto the perfect day.” His reviews of his character which were peculiar, not for apology or excuse but for austerity and strictness, exhibit a gradual advance and elevation—an escape from the slough of self-seeking and self-depending to the clearer light that cheers the soul which finds in itself emptiness or evil, but in Christ Jesus fulness and holiness. He refers to a perilous illness which he endured in childhood, “when all the blindness and obstinacy of sin possessed me,—such wilfulness as human nature at every age can exhibit”—again, a few years have elapsed, and he describes himself as solemnized by the stillness of the parental roof on the Lord’s Day—speaks of his seeking to be alone, and having a pressure on his soul as though he could not go from the Spirit, nor flee from the presence, of the God who was so near to him; and yet a few years more, and he discovers on review, “the *puppyism* and conceit which must have been displeasing to every humble minded and intelligent observer.” In the sternness of his self-scrutiny he thus expresses himself—“Surely I am greatly changed—I am ashamed and confounded at the power this world had over me to make me imitate its madness amid the profession of so many better motives—my self-conceit, and vanity, and wickedness, and weakness, astonish me. How much have even you known of me to despise! I often ask myself how you bore with my conceit, which certainly to me now would be insufferable in any other person. Madness has been in my heart—may the Spirit of Jesus put me and keep me in a sound mind.” He refers to his demeanour when, in 1817, he was introduced to us—such revolution could seven years work in his view of his own character; yet, if the conceit existed, of which he so fiercely accused himself, it was imperceptible to us, who enjoyed the freshness of the views and criticisms of a foreigner the more that his bearing was marked by manly modesty. When difference of opinion led to discussion, it was marked on his part by philosophical enquiry and rational desire to be convinced, accompanied by uniform politeness and deference to his seniors. We sometimes smiled at his fastidiousness, which appears to me a more suitable term than “conceit;” but when we told him the working-day-world would drive that away, as his power of usefulness increased, he met us rather

with meek admission than with defence or denial. Yet there must have been foundation for his self-accusing; for a very intimate and interested observer wrote of him in a similar strain in 1826—"He has improved very much since you knew him face to face—he has gained in energy and efficiency, which will increase his usefulness in the Church; and has banished a great deal of fastidiousness, so that he is enabled willingly to be a servant of any one for Christ's sake. He has a growing influence among the clergy, which I feel he will always use on the best side."

The brief explanation of this improvement was that his faith was strengthened—an enlarged conception of the Divine wisdom and holiness, a closer view of the fitness of the Redeemer for all his deep necessities, a consciousness of being about his Master's business daily, and the comfort in all short-comings and perplexities of feeling that "the name of the Lord is a strong tower into which the righteous runneth and is safe," cut short many unprofitable self-scrutinies, and cleared away many a cloud which a very tender conscience was apt to raise between his soul and the perfect work on which he ultimately relied with quietness and assurance. With the strengthening of Mr. Bruen's faith was also strengthened his Christian liberty. At one time in Paris, with much pain to himself, he refused the dying request of his Christian friend to commemorate the Redeemer's dying love privately in her chamber. He seemed to be in bondage to some idea of church order; yet, shortly after, meeting with his friend Dr. Malan, at Havre, when he was about to embark for his native land, he concludes the expression of their joyful sympathy thus—"At length we parted—not until we had prayed together—not until we had broken bread together—yes, (and two penitent sinners, I trust,) not until in this land of drought, in the moment of separation from off this table on which I write, we had commemorated the dying of the Lord Jesus. It was no time to settle forms, nor is it now time to explain, but I know that God was with us of a truth; and Jesus, thou wilt be ever with us even unto the end; and the end cometh." When he re-crossed the ocean, two years later, he still retained a sweet savour of that opportunity. He described his emotions alone in the throng on the docks at Havre, waiting till the wind should change, and his joy at meeting Malan, as he landed from an English packet, the unresting and unthinking hurry of their hotel, the solemnity of their secret devotions in their upper chamber, when the door was shut, and their realizing of the presence of the Lord as on the stained table over which they leaned, they reverently partook of bread and wine in thankful remembrance of his death. That time of refreshing, so independent of the preparations and outward forms which man calls solemn, reminds us of churches in the desert, or of those forty days, apart from the history of the common world, when the Lord stood in the midst of the disciples in their upper chamber, and said "Peace be unto you."

Later still, in his ministerial history, Mr. Bruen mentioned enjoying the ordinance privately in New York with a man in the last stage of consumption. This person had but recently experienced a saving change under his ministrations; and he, without hesitation, joyfully partook with him of the strengthening memorials, before the new-born spirit ascended to his God. That the beloved pastor who administered should so soon be summoned to follow his dying disciple, fills my soul afresh with tender regret; not surely that he has been called to go up higher, but that the Church which felt it could not spare him, has been deprived of his services, when he had, after many struggles, attained the stature of a perfect man in Christ Jesus.

Believe me yours with sincere respect and esteem,

M. G. L. DUNCAN.