

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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ment; An Essay on the excellency and advantages of the Gospel; Remarks on the Theatre and public amusements, in thirteen Numbers; Hints on Education, in fourteen Numbers; The Sovereignty of the People, in twelve Numbers; A Fair Statement and Appendix to the same in eighteen Numbers, containing an Address to President Adams; Servility of Prejudice displayed, in nine Numbers; Federal Sedition and Anti-democracy, in six Numbers; A Vindication of Mr. Jefferson, in two Numbers; and the Retreat, a Poem.



ROBERT DAVIDSON, D. D.

1772—1812.

FROM THE REV. ROBERT DAVIDSON, D. D.

NEW BRUNSWICK, N. J., September 7, 1848.

Dear Sir: In accordance with the promise given when I last saw you, I place in your hands the following biographical sketch.

ROBERT DAVIDSON was born at Elkton, Md., in 1750. He was graduated at the University of Pennsylvania in 1771. At the age of twenty-two he was licensed by the Presbytery of Newcastle; and the following year ordained by the Second Presbytery of Philadelphia. In the interim, he contracted a marriage, the circumstances of which may not be unworthy of notice.

While a student of Divinity, he was seized with a dangerous illness, at a farm house in the country, and owed his life to the assiduous care and kind nursing of a daughter of his host. She became so much attached to her patient, that, upon his recovery, he ascertained there was but one way in which he could repay her. Such was his gratitude, and such his nice sense of honour, that, finding her happiness seriously involved, he married her; although she was older than himself, had not the slightest pretension to beauty, and moved in an humble sphere of life. She made him, however, for upwards of thirty years, an excellent and devoted wife. She came to a tragical end, being killed by the overturning of a carriage.

When but twenty-three years of age, such was his reputation that he was appointed an instructor in the University of Pennsylvania, and soon after chosen Professor of History, and also assistant to Dr. Ewing, Pastor of the First Presbyterian Church of Philadelphia. In 1775, he composed a Dialogue in verse, with two odes set to music, which was performed as an exercise, at Commencement, in the presence of the Continental Congress. The Dialogue, which was published, was easy and flowing, and full of patriotic allusions. In July of the same year, he delivered a sermon on

installed, May 8, 1799; and was afterwards pastor of Bethel Presbyterian Church, York District, S. C., where he died on the 18th of August, 1843, aged seventy-one years.

JAMES MCREE, D. D., above mentioned, was born in the County of Iredell, N. C., May 10, 1752,—his parents having emigrated from the County of Down, Ireland, in 1730. He became a member of the Junior class in the College of New Jersey in 1773, and graduated in 1775. He studied Theology under the direction of the Rev. Joseph Alexander, D. D. of Bulloek's Creek, S. C.; was licensed to preach by the Presbytery of Orange in April, 1778; became Pastor of the Congregation of Steele Creek in Mecklenburg County in September following, where he remained about twenty years; then, in 1798, took charge of the Congregation of Centre, thirty miles North from Steele Creek, where he spent the remainder of his life, and died in 1840. He was honoured with the degree of Doctor of Divinity from the University of North Carolina in 1810.

the War before several military companies, from I. Chron. v. 22.—“For there fell down many slain, because the war was of God.” A month had not yet elapsed since the battle of Bunker Hill, and the sermon shared all the enthusiastic fervour of the times. It was repeated in a fortnight before the troops at Burlington. An extract will show how limited were the views of the Americans at that period:—

“*Independence we seek not*,—but our dependance must consist with liberty, and produce mutual good.” “We mean to be on an equal footing with the Parliament of Great Britain, who are in truth but our brethren and equals. We mean to have, as the Constitution allows them to have, a voice, *in union with our King*, in all the laws which are to bind us, and to have the free disposal of that property we clearly earn, and which they pretend a right to extort from us, on what occasions and in what proportion they please.”

One who spoke his mind so freely, could hardly be safe when the British forces took possession of Philadelphia two years after; and, accordingly, from that time till they evacuated the city, he was compelled to rusticate in Delaware.

In 1784, he published an Epitome of Geography in verse, for the use of schools, which was highly esteemed in its day. It was reviewed, as an Antiquarian curiosity, in Judge Hall’s Western Monthly Magazine, (published in Cincinnati,) November, 1835. The Reviewer fell into a mistake, however, in confounding the author with Mr. James Davidson, who was altogether guiltless of the sin of poetry, but who was also a Professor in the same University, and sometimes called old Wiggie, from a habit he had of pulling off his wig, and beating delinquent pupils with it. Of the skill with which the poet mastered the difficulty of managing proper names, I may give the following specimen:—

“On the heights of the Alps much of Switzerland lies,
 “The Alps, whence the Rhine and the Rhone take their rise,
 “Schaffhausen, and Basel and Bern,
 “Apenzel, and Zurich and Swisse,
 “Uris, Zug, Underwald, and Lucerne,
 “Solothurn, Fribourg, and Glaris.”

Sometimes he met with names so intractable that he fairly gave them up.

“A Monomotapan, ’tis hard to describe,
 “Or paint one of Mehenemugi’s rude tribe,
 “Of other rude nations strange things we might tell
 “But time is too short, on such subjects to dwell.
 “So rude e’en their names are, ’tis no easy thing,
 “Of Mataman, Natal, and Souquas to sing;
 “Or Sousiquas, Sofala, Sabia, press,
 “With Consiquas, Odiquas, into my verse.”

While the young Professor thus assiduously devoted himself to the interests of literature, his judgment was held in high estimation in the Church; and although not a ready debater, his name is found in the Minutes of the Old Synod on the most important Committees. But a new sphere of duty was now presented to him. Dickinson College was founded in Carlisle under the Presidency of the distinguished Dr. Nisbet, and he was invited to become one of his coadjutors. “His name will be of use to us,”—wrote Dr. Rush to Dr. Nisbet, “for he is a man of learning, and of an excellent private character.” Upon taking leave of the University, the Trustees showed their sense of his merits and services, by conferring on him the degree of Doctor of Divinity.

Dr. Davidson was thirty-four years of age when he entered on his new and important duties. On the 1st of November, 1784, he was appointed Vice President of Dickinson College, and Professor of History and Belles Lettres; and, at the same time, became the Pastor of the Presbyterian Church of Carlisle. A serious division had recently occurred in that large congregation, but their new pastor, by his conciliatory manners, succeeded in harmonizing the discordant elements, and, for eight and twenty years, while he was connected with them, uninterrupted peace prevailed.

While he discharged his parochial duties with exemplary fidelity, he was indefatigable in meeting his engagements in the College. The year after his accession, he composed a Dialogue in blank verse, in honour of the patrons of the College, which was spoken in public and printed. Every moment was occupied. His maxim was "*a place for every thing, and every thing in its place.*" By means of his systematic habits, he was continually enlarging his acquisitions. He made himself acquainted with eight languages,—ancient, modern, and oriental; he was well versed in Theology; and was familiar with the whole circle of science. But Astronomy was his favourite study. He published some papers on this subject; and invented an ingenious apparatus, called a "*Cosmosphere, or Compound Globe,*" presenting the heaven and the earth to view on the same axis. By means of a movable horizontal plane, zodiac, solar index, &c., the relative positions of the sun and moon, the length of the day, the changes of the seasons, the time of eclipses, the procession of the equinoxes, and the rise and fall of the constellations, were rendered perfectly plain, and the solution of problems greatly facilitated.

He was also an amateur and composer of sacred music, and, in his earlier years, amused himself with executing pen drawings, some of which (Louis XIV., and Marie Antoinette particularly) are great curiosities. They have deceived connoisseurs, and have been taken for engravings, even by the distinguished painter, Mr. Nagle. But, from the early date of all these performances, it is evident that he had self-denial enough to sacrifice his elegant tastes at the shrine of those sterner duties which absorbed all his time and energy.

Called upon frequently to address the public on the great National Festivals, he always acquitted himself with credit, as his published Discourses evince. But, in 1794, he was placed in an unusually trying position. On the 28th of September of that year, he preached a sermon from Proverbs xiii, 34, on "the Duties of Citizens," before a large body of troops, on their way to suppress the Whiskey Insurrection; and again on the 5th of October, from II. Samuel vii, 23, on "the Freedom and Happiness of the United States," before President Washington, Governor Mifflin, and a large number of forces bound on the same expedition. The first of these, Dr. Miller describes as "a judicious but modest and mild discourse, which, though not very acceptable to the populace, gave but little offence." (Life of Nisbet, p. 223.) This modest and mild discourse, (which was very different from the caustic sermon that followed in the afternoon from Dr. Nisbet, his colleague, in the church, and which nearly provoked a mob,) nevertheless denounced the "*guilt of rebellion*" on the insurgents, and spoke freely of the wickedness of "countenancing mobs, riots, and seditions." If the populace was displeased, the authorities were highly gratified, and

Governor Mifflin tendered to the Pastor a Chaplain's Commission, which was however declined.

In 1796, Dr. Davidson attained one of the highest honours of the Church, in being chosen Moderator (the eighth in order) of the General Assembly,—an office which he filled with his accustomed mingled dignity and affability.

Upon the death of General Washington, in 1799, he pronounced a Funeral Eulogium, which is to be seen in a printed collection of Discourses, elicited by that melancholy occasion; and, upon the decease of Dr. Nisbet, in 1804, he paid a like tribute to his memory,—an extract from which may be found in Dr. Miller's Life of Nisbet, pp. 290–296.

After this event, the burden of the College devolved upon him, and for five years he discharged the duty of President. In 1809, he resigned, to devote himself exclusively to his pastoral charge, and received a vote of thanks from the Trustees for his long and faithful services. A few months previously, he had lost his second wife, after a brief union of two years—Margaret, daughter of the Hon. John Montgomery, of Carlisle. He gave vent to his grief in a touching Monody, which deserves mention as containing a prayer fulfilled long after its author was laid in the dust. The prayer was for his infant and only son, that, if spared to riper years, "*he might to holy office rise.*" What encouragement may pious parents derive from the recorded fulfilment of such prayers!

In 1810, April 17th, Dr. Davidson was married to Jane, daughter of the Hon. William Harris, Member of Assembly, and Commissioner to issue the old Continental money. This excellent lady, every way worthy of his choice, still survives.* In 1811, he published "The Christian's A. B. C.," or the 119th Psalm, in metre,—each octave commencing with the appropriate letter of the alphabet, with the exception of Q, X, and Z. This was followed, the next year, by a "New Metrical Version of the Psalms," with annotations. It does not pretend to compete with Watts, but is far superior to Sternhold and Hopkins, improved by Rouse. All the versification is not equally smooth. A stanza from the 148th Psalm, is as favourable as any, and will compare well, even with Dr. Watts:—

"Let bending age forget its cares,
"And count his mercies o'er;
"And lisping infancy attempt
"His goodness to adore."

But the time had now arrived, when this good man, pronounced by those who knew him best, "a blessing to the circle he occupied," was to take his leave of earth. He died of dropsy in the chest, after protracted agonies, which he bore as became a Christian, December 13, 1812, on the Sabbath day, in the sixty-second year of his age. A Funeral Sermon, afterwards printed, containing a sketch of his life and labours, was preached by his intimate friend, Dr. Cathcart, of York.

As a preacher, Dr. Davidson was instructive, clear and unaffected, but not fluent. He always had a better command of his pen than his tongue. He could not make the briefest address, without first committing it to paper, and then experienced great difficulty in remembering it. This embarrassment was owing to an unfeigned diffidence and extreme sensibility, which always prevented his making a figure as a debater or extempore speaker. His judgment, however, was so mature, and his opinions so well digested,

* She has deceased since this letter was written.

that he was in great request as a counsellor. Upon his tomb is engraved the inscription, more enviable than military trophies,—A BLESSED PEACEMAKER.

As a man of letters, his standing was high. His clear intellect and extensive acquirements gave him great aptitude for communicating instruction. Of his diligent and studious habits, he left ample proof in twenty manuscript volumes of Sermons and Scientific Lectures, in addition to all that he had given to the public through the press.

I remain, dear Sir,

Yours truly,

R. DAVIDSON.

JAMES POWER, D. D.*

1772—1830.

JAMES POWER was born at Nottingham, Chester County, Pa., in the year 1746. His father was a substantial farmer, and had emigrated early in life from the North of Ireland, and settled amongst his countrymen, who composed the majority of the neighbourhood. He was fitted for College in his native place, at an Academy established and conducted by the Rev. Dr. Samuel Finley, afterwards President of Princeton College; and he was graduated at Princeton in 1766,—the last year of Dr. Finley's Presidency; so that his whole literary training seems to have been under that eminent man. He was one of the students of College, who visited Dr. Finley on his death-bed, in Philadelphia; and the affecting scene left a powerful and enduring impression on his mind. Among his classmates in College were Oliver Ellsworth, David Howell, Luther Martin, Nathaniel Niles, and several other eminent men.

He was licensed to preach by the Presbytery of Newcastle at Mill Creek, on the 24th of June, 1772,—having been somewhat delayed in the prosecution of his theological studies by ill health. On the 23d of December following, the Presbytery granted him leave to travel into Virginia; and this journey he evidently accomplished, as, in August of the next year, he received a call to settle over the united Congregations of Highbridge, Cambridge, and Oxford, in Bottetourt County, Va. This call, however, he did not accept, and whether he subsequently visited and supplied these congregations for a season is not known. But, in the summer of 1774, he crossed the Alleghany Mountains, and spent three months as a missionary, in what are now Westmoreland, Alleghany, Washington, and Fayette, Counties, in Pennsylvania.

At the expiration of this tour, he returned to the East, and preached as a stated supply for nearly two years,—it is believed at West Nottingham, and at another place within the bounds of Maryland. In the spring of 1776, however, he seems to have made up his mind to settle in the West; for on the 23d of May, of that year, the Presbytery determined to ordain him *sine titulo*, at their next meeting in August, “as he was about to

* Appendix to Elliott's Life of Macurdy.—Smith's Old Redstone.—MS. from Rev. Dr. Carnahan.