

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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yielded, and, much to his surprise, as soon as worship was ended, the horses were found coming up leisurely to the house. An old gentleman in Tennessee, who remembered having met Dr. Clark in one of the Carolinas, told me that, being at the time a small boy, the Doctor had taken him between his knees to talk to him. He said he had never forgotten the first question asked him:—"John, have the cats got any souls?" The above, I suppose, will suffice in the way of illustrative anecdotes.

I will only add that

I am sincerely yours.

T. BEVERIDGE.

ALEXANDER DOBBIN.

1774—1809.

FROM THE REV. JOHN McJIMSEY, D.D.

MONTGOMERY, N. Y., November 28, 1848.

Rev. and dear Sir: It gives me pleasure to comply with your request in furnishing you with some brief sketches of my excellent friend, long since departed, the Rev. Alexander Dobbin; and, in doing so, I shall avail myself of some notices of his life and character which I had occasion to prepare several years ago.

ALEXANDER DOBBIN was born in Londonderry, Ireland, February 4, (O. S.) 1742. Little is known of his parentage, or of his early religious education or exercises, excepting that his father was a sailor by profession, and probably a religious man; as it has been stated on good authority, that it was on account of the early piety of his son that he directed his studies with a view to the Ministry; and the purpose of the son to devote himself to this work was formed at the early age of seventeen. With this in view, he studied Latin and Greek in Londonderry, and then became a student in Glasgow, where he pursued his literary and theological course for seven years. On leaving College he was soon licensed to preach the Gospel, and was ordained by the Reformed Presbytery of Ireland, commonly known by the name of the Covenanters, on account of their attachment to the principles of the Covenanted Reformation in Scotland. He never had a pastoral charge in Ireland, and was ordained with the express design of leaving his native country, and preaching the Gospel in North America. From his early piety and the devotedness of his subsequent life to the interests of the Redeemer's Kingdom, there can be no doubt that he was influenced in the choice of the Gospel ministry, and of his ecclesiastical relations, by a deep sense of religious obligation. He was licensed, ordained, and married, and sailed for America,—all in the short period of six weeks. The Rev. Matthew Lind, a senior minister of the same denomination, accompanied him in his voyage, and they arrived in safety at New Castle in the year 1774. Both these excellent men were sent out by the Reformed Presbytery of Ireland to preach the Gospel in this country, in consequence of urgent solicitations for a supply of ministers, made by emigrants from Scotland and Ireland, who either had belonged to or preferred that denomination. These two ministers, soon after their arrival, with the Rev. John Cuthbertson, who had been sent to this country by the Reformed

Presbytery of Scotland as early as the year 1752, constituted themselves into a Presbytery, known as the Reformed Presbytery of North America.

Shortly after Mr. Dobbin's arrival in this country, he was settled as Pastor of a congregation at Rock Creek, near the spot where Gettysburg, Pa., now stands, although that town was not in existence until several years after his settlement in that vicinity. This was his home, and the centre of his labours, while he lived; though, for four years after his settlement at Rock Creek, he preached, the fourth part of the time, at or near Green Castle, Franklin County. In addition to his pastoral duties, which he discharged with most exemplary diligence and punctuality, he made several missionary tours, preaching the Gospel in more remote and destitute places.

Mr. Dobbin possessed an eminently catholic spirit,—an illustration of which we have in the early and prominent part which he took in the effort to heal one of the divisions of the Church; in other words, to effect a re-union between the Reformed Presbytery and the Associate Body in this country. The difference of views between these two Religious Bodies, previous to the Declaration of American Independence, related principally to the lawfulness of acknowledging the government of Great Britain, as it was constituted. This difference having been in a measure removed, in the providence of God, by the above important event, Mr. Dobbin was among the first and most efficient members of his Presbytery to countenance a union of the two denominations. As these two Ecclesiastical Bodies held substantially the same views in respect to doctrine, discipline and government, agreeably to the Westminster Confession of Faith, to which both professed their adherence and attachment, it appeared to judicious and unprejudiced men, in each of the separate Bodies, that there was no sufficient reason why they should remain distinct denominations. Both the Bodies now agreed in acknowledging the lawfulness of the civil authorities established in the United States by the Revolution, in the accomplishment of which the zealous and patriotic co-operation of the members of each of the denominations had been eminently instrumental. Mr. Dobbin, accordingly, as one of the ministers of the Reformed Presbytery, took an early and decided part in the deliberations and proceedings in relation to the proposed union. After the lapse of some years, during which several meetings of the two Bodies were held for conference and mutual explanations, the two Presbyteries of the Associate Body, (with the exception of two ministers who did not fall in with the measure,) and the Reformed Presbytery, were merged in one denomination, under the name of the Associate Reformed Synod.

Not far from the time when this union was consummated, there was an Associate Congregation at Marsh Creek, which had then recently become vacant, at the distance of a few miles from the place of Mr. Dobbin's settlement. This congregation presented a call to Mr. D., and obtained him for their Pastor for half of the time; and until the close of his ministry, he continued to preach alternately between that congregation and Rock Creek, now Gettysburg, where a new place of worship was erected for him some time previous to his death. Notwithstanding his new congregation had been formerly connected with the Associate branch of the Church,—a circumstance which might naturally enough have predisposed them to jealousy and dissatisfaction, especially as efforts were made by Ecclesiastical Bodies in fatherland to disparage the union and break it up,—yet such was the combination of gifts and graces in Mr. D.'s character, that the har-

monious relations between him and his people are not known ever to have suffered the least interruption.

As an interesting and instructive Preacher, Mr. Dobbin was held in high estimation. His mode of preaching was, in some sense, extemporaneous. I do not mean by this that his sermons or lectures were not studied and well-digested; but they were not read, neither were they written out and committed to memory. His method was to make a brief analysis of his subject, and, after mature reflection, to trust to his feelings in the delivery for the appropriate language. The matter of his sermons was highly evangelical; and yet it was no further doctrinal than as it had an important bearing on Christian principles and a holy practice. His voice was strong and sonorous; his gesture striking and occasionally eccentric; and his manner, on the whole, highly acceptable. On Communion seasons he was especially appropriate and excellent.

As Mr. Dobbin had a large family to educate, and was unable, from his limited means, to send them abroad for this purpose, he was induced, chiefly by this consideration, to open a private classical boarding-school in his own house, and he continued it without interruption from 1788 to 1799. As there was no similar institution in the region, it soon came to be extensively known and patronized; and it proved in its results to be of incalculable benefit to many of the youth of that district, and through them to the next generation. He was much distinguished for his attainments in classical learning, particularly in the Latin, Greek and Hebrew languages. The late Dr. Gray, than whom it would be difficult to find a more competent judge, once said of him that, "at a meeting of their Presbytery, he gave a critical analysis of one of the Psalms, extempore, in which he displayed a profound acquaintance with the original language and with the rules of criticism." Many of his students have been distinguished in the different professions, and not less than twenty-five of them became Ministers of the Gospel. Previous to the period when the Theological Seminary in New York went into operation, under the instruction of the late Dr. Mason, Mr. Dobbin might be regarded as really the Theological Professor of his denomination; not indeed by the appointment of Synod, but by the voluntary selection of his students, and the implied approbation of the Ecclesiastical Body with which he was connected. His services in this department were of great value, and there are several clergymen still living, who can testify, from their own experience, to the ability and fidelity with which he discharged this important trust.

Mr. Dobbin was remarkably punctual in his attendance on meetings of Presbytery and Synod; and a full share of public duties, on these occasions, was always assigned to him. As a proof of the high estimation in which he was held by his denomination, he was chosen, at different times, Moderator of the Synod. This, however, was conferred upon him at the first meeting of the General Synod, held at Green Castle, in 1804; and, at the next meeting at Philadelphia, in 1805, he preached the Opening Sermon,—the last sermon, it is believed, that he ever preached in the presence of the Synod, though he attended several of its subsequent meetings.

In his private and social intercourse Mr. Dobbin was uncommonly agreeable. Being naturally of a cheerful and playful disposition, his company was always acceptable to the families in which he occasionally lodged. On one occasion, being asked by the lady of the house where he stopped, how many children he had, he pleasantly and respectfully replied,—“Madam, I have seven sons and every

one of them has a sister." The answer at first excited astonishment at the size of his family, until he informed his hostess that, although he had seven sons, he had at that time only one daughter.

Mr. Dobbin was twice married. His first wife, whose maiden name was *Isabella Gamble*, he brought with him from Europe. From this union there were ten children,—seven sons and three daughters. One of the sons, *Daniel*, was a physician, and another, *James*, a lawyer. Mrs. Dobbin died on the 19th of August, 1800, in the forty-ninth year of her age. Mr. Dobbin was married, a second time, in 1801, to the widow of Daniel Agnew, of Adams County, Pa. Her maiden name was *Mary Irvin*. There were no children by this marriage. The second Mrs. Dobbin died August 21, 1824.

Mr. Dobbin continued his labours with great zeal, and no inconsiderable success, until October, 1808, when, on his way to church in Gettysburg, he ruptured a blood-vessel by coughing, and was unable to preach any more. His disease settled into consumption and terminated fatally June 1, 1809, when he was in the sixty-seventh year of his age. During the period of his decline, and in the near approach of death, he was full of peace and hope, and furnished a delightful proof of the all-sustaining power of the Gospel which he had preached. In his intercourse with his people he was very familiar, and did not scruple to play ball with them, and mingle with them in other amusements. He dressed in short pantaloons, with long stockings, and wore the wig. He had a large pointed nose, and a bright black eye. His speech was strongly marked by the foreign accent. With his great excellencies he combined striking eccentricities.

I am, dear Sir, with great respect, yours,

JOHN McJIMSEY.

FROM THE REV. JAMES M. MATHEWS, D.D.

NEW YORK. June 19, 1862.

My dear Dr. Sprague: The Rev. Alexander Dobbin, of whom you ask for my recollections, I did not know until he had considerably past his meridian; but, from the time that I was a student of Theology till his death, I had frequent and good opportunities of gathering material, from personal intercourse with him, for an intelligent estimate of his character.

Mr. Dobbin was rather small in stature, and was by no means imposing in his general appearance. His face, like his heart, was benignity itself—his features were always lighted up with a most loving smile, and he could not open his lips but that you felt that you were in contact with a most loving spirit. Without the semblance of any thing that looked patronizing, he seemed to delight especially in acts of kindness towards his younger brethren in the ministry; never losing an opportunity to perform a kind act, or drop a cheering word, which would in any way minister to their comfort or advantage. I remember being once at a dinner party with him in Philadelphia; and, being seated next to him at the table, I took his tumbler to drink, supposing it were my own. Observing my mistake, he said to me, with great good-nature, in Scotch phrase,—what amounted to this,—“I am glad to share with you in any thing that will promote your enjoyment.” He was very social and communicative, but always talked in a discreet and edifying manner. You could not converse with him, even casually, without being impressed with the idea that his soul was a fountain of pure sunbeams.

I think I never heard Mr. Dobbin preach, but he had a good reputation as a Preacher, being rather sound and instructive than brilliant or striking

Without any particular evidence in respect to his character as a Pastor, I venture to say, from what I knew both of his head and of his heart, that he was rarely excelled either in pastoral tenderness, diligence or fidelity. I often met him in Ecclesiastical Bodies, and was always impressed by the sound judgment and prudent forethought which he manifested on these occasions. Whenever he offered an opinion or a suggestion, he was always listened to by his brethren with deferential attention. Every where his simplicity, his integrity, his benevolence, his good sense, secured to him a large share of confidence and good-will, and an enduring memorial in the hearts of those with whom he associated.

Most affectionately,
J. M. MATHEWS.

MATTHEW HENDERSON, JR.

1784—1835.

FROM THE REV. A. G. WALLACE.

STEWARTSVILLE, PA., September 17, 1862.

My dear Sir: After having explored as diligently as I could the field of the Rev. Matthew Henderson's labours, (which is now my own field,) and gathered from some of the surviving members of his family whatever facts of interest they could furnish respecting him, I herewith send you the following sketch as the best result I have been able to reach.

MATTHEW HENDERSON the younger was born on Octorora Creek, Chester County, Pa., on the 10th of January, 1762; and, being the eldest child of the family, he received the name borne by his father and grandfather. He inherited from his father a large share of independence, combined with an amiable disposition and a high degree of reverence. He was carefully instructed in the knowledge of the Bible, and also of the devotional formularies of the Associate Reformed Church, but was not imbued with a sectarian spirit. His father was a liberal minded, self-sacrificing minister, who felt deeply the claims of the destitute, and therefore had a warm heart for all who earnestly laboured for their salvation. He infused the same spirit into his son; taught him to adhere firmly to his own convictions of truth, but to make the advancement of Christ's cause his primary object, and to love all who were fellow-labourers in his work.

A hundred years ago, educational facilities in this region were very limited; and hence Mr. Henderson's classical education was principally under his father. He began the study of Latin with a Mr. McGregor, a teacher of an English school, when he was about sixteen years of age. The Associate Presbytery, in order "to encourage pious and promising young men to pursue studies with a view to the Holy Ministry," appointed the Rev. John Smith "to instruct such as" might "offer themselves, in philosophy, as Divine Providence" might "lead the way." Mr. Smith being a fine scholar, and the ministerial neighbour and intimate friend of the elder Mr. Henderson, the young man was placed under his care. Of the time that he remained there, or of the progress that he made in his studies we have no account; but, as the father had a large family, and was frequently called to a distance to fulfil appointments, it is probable that the eldest