

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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VOLUME III.

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.

THADDEUS DOD.*

1775—1793.

THADDEUS DOD, the son of Stephen Dod, was born near Newark, N. J. on the 7th of March, (O. S.) 1740. His father, who was a native of Guilford, Conn., removed from Newark to Mendham in the same State, while this son was in his infancy; and there the son spent his youthful days. From early childhood he had strong religious impressions, and the private record of his exercises through a series of years shows that he was the subject of almost constant internal conflicts, until the year 1764, when he believed that he experienced a decisive change of character. The next year he was admitted to the Communion of the Church in Mendham.

At a very early period he began to develop an extraordinary taste and talent for Mathematics, and he was earnestly desirous of obtaining a collegiate education; but the straitened circumstances of his father forbade the expectation of it, except as it should be accomplished through his own efforts. By teaching school at different times, and studying as he could find opportunity, he at length succeeded in becoming fitted to enter College, and in acquiring the means of meeting his expenses there. He joined the Sophomore class of the College of New Jersey in the spring of 1771, and was graduated in the autumn of 1773, under the Presidency of Dr. Witherspoon. Soon after leaving College, he went to Newark, N. J., where he was married to Phoebe Baldwin, and about the same time entered on the study of Theology under the direction of the Rev. Dr. McWhorter. After remaining there about a year, he removed to Morristown, where he continued his studies under the Rev. Timothy Johnes, who had been his first teacher in Latin. He was licensed to preach by the New York Presbytery, in 1775.

In the winter of 1776-77, he was confined by a severe attack of inflammatory rheumatism; but in the month of March, though still unable to dress himself without assistance, he resolved on making a tour to the West. After preaching in parts of Virginia and Maryland, he crossed the mountains, and visited the settlements of George's Creek, Muddy Creek, and Dunlap's Creek, and proceeded thence to Tennile. As there were, at the latter place a number of families, who had removed from Morris County, it is not improbable that they had invited him to visit them, and that his journey was undertaken with special reference to that purpose. This emigration had taken place about the year 1773, when there had been for several years peace with the Indian tribes; but, by a fresh outbreak in the spring of 1774, these people were driven back, and took refuge in a fort near Monongahela River. The next year, they returned and built a fort, to which they could resort in time of danger. In the summer season, for several years, they were compelled frequently to remain together in the forts,—the men going out in armed parties to work on their farms; and in the winter, when the Indians retired to their wigwams and hunting grounds, they returned to their habitations. Such was the state of things when Mr. Dod went among them; and as they were his old friends, and some of them had been associated with him in the scenes of an interesting revival in New

* Presb. Mag. IV.—Smith's Old Red Stone.

Jersey, in 1764, the meeting must have been, to both parties, one of no common interest. The frequent incursions of the Indians had put a stop to immigration, and prevented the increase of their numbers, and consequently delayed, what they most ardently desired,—the establishment of a church, and the administration of its ordinances among them. After preaching, for some time, in that comparatively desolate region, he returned to New Jersey in August, 1777.

The people at Tennile, during his sojourn there, expressed a strong desire that he should take up his residence among them as their minister; and though there were not more than ten men within their bounds, who were professors of religion, and not one man of wealth among them all, they unanimously agreed to support him and his family, if he would cast in his lot with them, and share their simple and humble mode of living. Though he foresaw that his acceptance of their invitation would subject him to much self-denial and sacrifice, yet the interest which he felt in ministering to his early friends, and in seeing the Gospel planted in that new country, disposed and ultimately determined him to yield to their wishes; and accordingly he was ordained by the Presbytery of New York, *sine titulo*, in October, 1777, with a view to finding his home in that then distant part of the country.

Shortly after this, he left New Jersey, with his family, consisting of a wife and two children,—and also two of his brothers, with their families, to carry out his purpose in regard to an ultimate settlement. By the 10th of November, they had arrived at Patterson's Creek, in Hampshire County, Va., where Mr. Dod had made some acquaintance in his former tour. But hearing, while there, of a then recent formidable attack by the Indians on the Fort at Wheeling, and of the consequent confusion and terror prevailing throughout the West, they deemed it imprudent to proceed farther at that time. Mr. Dod, however, after remaining a few days with his family, left them, and crossing the mountains alone, proceeded to Tennile, where he preached in the forts, and baptized the children, and after a week returned.

He remained at Patterson's Creek for nearly two years, during which time he was employed in preaching there, and in the adjacent counties in Virginia and Maryland, where, it would seem, no churches had yet been organized. His labours in this field were attended with a manifest blessing, and when he was about to leave, a vigorous effort was made to retain him, and a much better support offered him than he could expect at Tennile; but he could not be diverted from his purpose. Accordingly, in September, 1779, he, with his wife and child, (for he had buried one child during his sojourn at Patterson's Creek,) and his two brothers, proceeded on their way, and crossed the mountains on pack horses, some of which had been sent from Tennile. One of his brothers, however, accompanied him only a part of the way, and then returned to New Jersey.

On reaching the place of his destination, he found a dark and forbidding state of things; but he entered upon his labours with great zeal and self-denial. On the 15th of August, 1781, he organized a church consisting of twenty-five members; but it was some time before the Lord's Supper could be administered, on account of their being exposed to the incursions of the savages. Mr. Dod was the second minister who settled West of the Monongahela River, (Dr. McMillan only having preceded him,) and took a position farther on the frontier than any other. Tennile, on the South, bordered

on an unbroken wilderness. A line of forts from Pittsburg to Wheeling protected the places farther North; but from Wheeling to Point Pleasant all was open to the savage foe. But though there were frequent hostile demonstrations on the part of the Indians, and though many families in the neighbourhood fell under the tomahawk and scalping knife, not one of the little company that emigrated from New Jersey was killed. And what was still more remarkable, the ministrations of Mr. Dod, in the midst of these perilous circumstances, and while the people, during part of the time, were shut up in the fort, were attended by a revival of religion, as the fruits of which upwards of forty were admitted to the church. The first administration of the Lord's Supper was in a barn, in May, 1783; and it was an occasion of great solemnity, and accompanied by unusual tokens of the Divine presence. The first house of worship was erected in the summer of 1785; and though public worship was held alternately in two sections of the congregation, no other was erected till the summer of 1792. There was but one organization of church or congregation while Mr. Dod lived.

As he had an exquisite taste for music, and withal was well acquainted with it as a science, he caused special attention to be given to the performance of that part of public worship. He used no other than Watts' Psalms and Hymns from the first. He delivered sermons and addresses designed to illustrate the importance of sacred music, and the manner in which it should be performed. And in 1792, he introduced singing without reading the line; and though it was to some rather an offensive innovation, it seems to have occasioned no serious disturbance.

Mr. Dod was specially attentive to the interests of education,—frequently visiting schools, and counselling and encouraging the teachers. He had a building erected within a few steps of his own dwelling, in which he opened a classical and mathematical school, in the spring of 1782. This school, which was the first of its kind in the West, was in operation for about three years and a half. It was discontinued in the autumn of 1785; but for what reasons, cannot now be definitely ascertained. Messrs. Smith and McMillan, who were associated with Mr. Dod as pioneers in the ministry, also sympathized with him most fully in the educational enterprise; and as the result of their consultation and co-operation, an Academy was instituted at Washington, Pa., for which a charter was granted, September 24, 1787, with a donation of five thousand acres of land. Mr. Dod was urgently solicited to become the head of this institution, and he finally—though not without great reluctance—consented to serve in that capacity for a single year. The institution went into operation on the 1st of April, 1789, with between twenty and thirty students. In connection with his duties as Principal, he continued his labours as a minister—preaching one-third of the time at Washington, and dividing the other two-thirds between the two places at Tenmile.

Mr. Dod's labours, throughout his whole ministry, seem to have been attended with much more than an ordinary blessing. Besides a regular increase of his church from year to year, there were several seasons of special religious interest, which brought in larger numbers. It was during such a season that he was called to rest from his labours. In the summer of 1792, a revival commenced among his people, which continued through the succeeding autumn and winter. Encouraged by this state of things, Mr. Dod was abundant in his labours, notwithstanding he was then rapidly

wasting under the influence of pulmonary consumption. At the fall meeting of Presbytery, he had been appointed to preach on the first Sabbath of April at Cross Creek, which had been rendered vacant by the death of the Rev. Joseph Smith. This appointment he insisted, contrary to the better judgment of his friends, on fulfilling; but it proved to be the last public service that he ever performed. In returning home, he was exposed to a violent storm, which, together with the fatigue occasioned by the exercise, effectually prostrated him. His disease now took on a more decided form, and he became convinced that the time of his departure was at hand. For a brief period, he was subject to distressing doubts in regard to his spiritual state; but before his death the joys of salvation were fully restored to him. He died on the 20th of May, 1793. A Discourse was preached at his funeral by the Rev. Dr. McMillan, from Rev. xiv. 13.

The following is an extract from an article written by his son, the Rev. Cephas Dod, of Amity, Pa., and published in the Presbyterian Magazine for August and September, 1854:—

“Mr. Dod in his early childhood evinced a love of learning, and it deserves particular notice that his attention was first turned to a careful reading of the Holy Scriptures, and seeking a knowledge of the doctrines of religion. At the age of about fifteen or sixteen years, he took to mathematical studies, which he pursued with great ardour, though without an instructor, and his attainments were probably not the less profound, because made with little assistance. Rev. Dr. Carnahan, in a letter dated July, 1841, wrote—‘The following anecdote will show the estimation in which your father’s mathematical talents and attainments were held by his contemporaries in the College. Before the death of Chief Justice Kirkpatrick, who was a Trustee of the College, Albert B. Dod, our present Professor of Mathematics, was nominated in the Board of Trustees for the Mathematical Chair, and the Judge remarked that he was not acquainted with the candidate, and did not know his reputation as a mathematician; nevertheless he would vote for him most cheerfully; he liked the name; that he never knew a Dod (and he was acquainted with many of them) that was not born a mathematician; that there was one Thaddeus Dod in College when he was a student, who seemed to understand mathematics by instinct; that all the students applied to him for aid when any thing difficult occurred in their mathematical studies. He presumed the candidate was of the same stock,* and he would vote for him.

“It does not appear that he was less eminent as a classical than a mathematical scholar. The Greek and Hebrew texts prefixed to some of his discourses,—each neatly written in its appropriate character,—show his familiarity with those languages. He had much versatility of talent, and could pursue with pleasure any branch of science; but the word of God, the doctrine of the Cross, was his favourite study.

“Rev. Dr. Eliot, in his Address at the Inauguration of Dr. Clark, as President of Washington College, uses the following language in reference to Washington Academy and Mr. Dod—namely:—‘As an Academy, it soon acquired distinction, by having for its first President the Rev. Thaddeus Dod, one of the early literary pioneers of Western Pennsylvania, the associate of McMillan, Power, and Smith, in the formation of the first Presbytery West of the Alleghany Mountains,—probably, if we may trust tradition, the most accomplished scholar of their number.’

“In preaching he used notes, seldom entering the pulpit without them; but they were, for the most part, very short; few of his discourses, though studied with great care, were written out in full. Being a subject of pulmonary disease, his voice was not strong, and did not admit of loud and passionate declamation. His enunciation was exceedingly distinct, and his emphasis correct, so that he was easily heard even by a large audience. In his manner, he always showed that he felt the truths he delivered, and was anxious that those whom he addressed should feel them too. His preaching was spoken of by ministers and people as being of a remarkably close discriminating character. He took great delight in religious conversation, entering deeply into its spirit, and this practice he urged upon his people in all their communications together, as a means of growth in grace, and of stirring each other up to love and good works. With the young people of his charge he used great familiarity, and especially by affectionately urging upon them the claims of the Gospel.”

* The Professor was a grand-nephew of Thaddeus Dod.