

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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not attended with much pain, he was "blessed with an uninterrupted assurance of the favour of God." An Address was delivered at his funeral by the Rev. Dr. Green of Philadelphia, which was published.

THE MCGREGORES.*

JAMES, 1718—1729.

DAVID, 1737—1777.

JAMES MCGREGORE received a thorough classical and theological education, and had the care of a Scot's Presbyterian Church in the North of Ireland. The sufferings to which Protestants were there subjected, in connection with his inextinguishable love of religious liberty, led him, with three other ministers, and a part of their respective congregations, to migrate to this country. As they were on the eve of embarking, he addressed a discourse to them, on the text—"If thy presence go not with me, carry us not up hence."

Mr. McGregore, with about one hundred families, arrived at Boston, on the 14th of October, 1718. The next winter he spent at Dracut; and, in the spring following, sixteen of the families who had accompanied him from Ireland, commenced a settlement on a tract of land near Haverhill, which was then called Nutfield, but which they named Londonderry. Mr. McGregore now joined the party from whom he had been temporarily separated, and on the 12th of April preached to them, under a large oak tree, the first sermon ever delivered in that place, from Isaiah xxxii. 2. The spot is known, and regarded with veneration, to this day.

As soon as the settlers had become organized as a religious Society, they proceeded according to the order of the Presbyterian Church, to invite Mr. McGregore to become their pastor. He accepted their call; but, as no Presbytery then existed in New England, the formality of an installation was dispensed with. On a day appointed for the purpose, the people met, and he solemnly assumed the pastoral charge of the church and congregation,—they in turn recognising him as their pastor and spiritual guide. He preached to them on the occasion from this very appropriate text—"Moreover, I will make a covenant of peace with them; and it shall be an everlasting covenant with them; and I will place them and multiply them, and will set my sanctuary in the midst of them forevermore."

There is a tradition that it was through the influence of Mr. McGregore with the Marquis de Vaudreil, then Governor of Canada, that the Colony, at an early period, was signally preserved from savage depredation. The two are said to have been intimate friends and correspondents; and the Governor, from respect to the wishes of his friend, directed the Catholic priests to charge the Indians not to molest or injure any of these people, as they were different from the English; and to assure them that not only would no bounty be paid for their scalps, but that the sin of murdering

* Parker's Hist. Londonderry.—Tracy's Great Awakening.—MS. from Rev. Dr. Whiton.

any of them would not be forgiven. Such is the tradition; and there are some circumstances that give to it, to say the least, an air of probability.

The church of which Mr. McGregore became pastor, was the first Presbyterian church in New England. It is not known how many composed it originally, but its increase was evidently rapid. At a Communion season in 1723, there were one hundred and sixty communicants; at another, a few months later, two hundred and thirty; and at the one immediately preceding his death, three hundred and seventy-five.

Mr. McGregore died, from a violent attack of fever, on the 5th of March, 1729, aged fifty-two. His Funeral Sermon was preached by the Rev. Samuel Phillips of Andover, from Zachariah i. 5.

Dr. Belknap, in his History of New Hampshire, represents him as "a wise, affectionate and faithful guide to his people, both in civil and religious matters."

The Rev. E. L. Parker, in his History of Londonderry, says,—

"His name and memory were most tenderly cherished by his bereaved flock, and succeeding generations; and the effects of his labours among them were long and widely felt. He possessed a robust constitution, and had enjoyed firm and uninterrupted health. He had never been visited with sickness, until seized with that which terminated his life. Though at the time but a youth, he was among the brave defenders of Londonderry in Ireland, and discharged from the tower of the Cathedral the large gun which announced the approach of the vessels that brought them relief. * * From traditional remarks, as well as from some few manuscripts of his which have been preserved, we are led to consider him a man of distinguished talents, both natural and acquired. He evidently possessed a vigorous and discriminating mind. He was strictly evangelical in his doctrinal views, and peculiarly spiritual and experimental in his preaching. During his short but severe sickness, he manifested a firm unshaken faith in the Saviour, and a lively hope of his interest in the promises of the Gospel. In the immediate prospect of death, he remarked to those around him that he trusted he had known Christ from the fourteenth year of his age, and would cheerfully confide to his hands his immortal interests. * * * His personal appearance was commanding; his stature tall and erect; his complexion rather dark; and his countenance expressive."

In October, 1706, Mr. McGregore was married to Marion Cargill, in Londonderry, Ireland. They had ten children, seven of whom, with their mother, survived him.

DAVID MCGREGORE was the third son of the Rev. James McGregore, and was born in Ireland, November 6, 1710. He received his literary and theological education, chiefly under the direction of the Rev. Matthew Clark,* his father's successor in the ministry. A new parish, called the West parish in Londonderry, having been formed, he was invited to take the pastoral charge of it. He was ordained in 1737; but the Society of which he became pastor was not actually incorporated till 1739. A controversy soon arose between the old and new parish, which lasted nearly forty years.

In the "great awakening" that took place in 1741, Mr. McGregore felt a deep interest, and took an active part. He visited Boston and some other

* MATTHEW CLARK came to this country from Ireland, soon after the death of the elder McGregore, and immediately repaired to Londonderry, where he found many of his countrymen and former acquaintance. At the request of the church and congregation, he consented to supply the pulpit, and take the pastoral care of the people, though he was not formally installed. Being a fine scholar, he officiated also as an instructor in the higher branches of education. Though about seventy years of age, when he came to this country, he continued to labour in the ministry with great vigour for more than six years. He had served as an officer in the Protestant army, during the civil commotions in Ireland, and received a wound in the memorable siege of Londonderry; but, after those agitations had subsided, he quit the military service, and prepared himself to wield the sword of the Spirit. He was thoroughly Calvinistic in his religious views, genial in his temper, independent in his feelings, and retained a good deal of the martial spirit as long as he lived. He married, as his third wife, the widow of his predecessor. He died January 25, 1735, aged seventy-six.

places where the revival prevailed, and returned to his people with a full purpose to do what he could, by the Divine blessing, to bring about a similar state of things in his own charge. He accordingly delivered a series of very impressive discourses from Ephesians v. 14,—“Awake, thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ will give thee light.” With this effort commenced a remarkable awakening among his own people, which resulted in large additions to the church. Mr. McGregore showed himself a firm friend to the revival of that period, and, as an evidence of it, his name appears affixed to the Testimony of an Assembly of pastors at Boston, July 4, 1743, expressing their belief “that there had been a happy and remarkable revival of religion in many parts of the land, through an uncommon Divine influence.” And, in a letter accompanying his Testimony, afterwards published in Prince’s History, he says,—

“For my own part, I have seen little or no appearance of the growth of Antinomian errors, or any thing visionary or enthusiastic, either in my own congregation, or among the people in the neighbourhood where I live. Indeed, if asserting justification by faith alone, and denying it by the law, as a covenant of words, while the eternal obligation of the law, as a rule of life, is strongly maintained in practice as well as profession,—if this, I say, be Antinomian doctrine, then we have a great growth of Antinomianism. Again, if asserting the necessity of supernatural influence or Divine energy in conversion, or the reality of the immediate witnessing and sealing of the Spirit, be enthusiasm, then we have a remarkable spread of enthusiasm; and, in these senses, may Antinomianism and enthusiasm grow more and more, till they overspread the whole land.”

In January, 1755, the Presbyterian congregation in the city of New York gave a call to Mr. McGregore to become their pastor. This call was regularly prosecuted before his Presbytery, which met at Pelham in April of that year, and afterwards at Boston in May following. Mr. McGregore, partly on account of his strong attachment to his own people, and partly from a conviction that the divided state of the church to which he was called, gave little promise of either ministerial comfort or usefulness, declined the call. In 1764, he received the degree of Master of Arts from the College of New Jersey.

Mr. McGregore did not survive his active usefulness. The last Sabbath that he spent on earth was a Communion season in his church. He preached on that occasion with his accustomed interest and animation, and then, exhausted by the effort, was carried out of the house. He was able, however, after a short time, to return and conclude the services; and this was the last meeting which he had with his people. He died in the utmost peace, on the Friday following, May 30, 1777, aged sixty-eight years. The Funeral Discourse was preached by the Rev. Dr. Whitaker, pastor of the Tabernacle Church in Salem, from II. Kings ii. 12.

The following is a list of Mr. McGregore’s publications:—A Sermon entitled “Professors warned of their danger,” 1741. The Spirits of the present day tried: A Sunday evening Lecture at Boston, 1741. A Sermon entitled “The believers all secured,” 1747. The Christian Soldier: A Sermon at the ordination of Alexander Boyd,* 1754. A Sermon on the death of the Rev. John Morehead, 1773.

*ALEXANDER BOYD studied Theology at the University of Glasgow, and came to this country, probably, early in 1748. In June of that year, at the suggestion of Mr. McGregore, he was taken under the care of the Boston Presbytery, and, having gone through the prescribed trials, was licensed to preach the Gospel. He was sent to preach first at Georgetown, Me., and in August, 1749, he received a call to settle in that place. But the Presbytery, having in the mean time heard some unfavourable reports from Scotland respecting him,—when the call came into their hands, returned it to the church, and cited their candidate to appear before them.

The Rev. E. L. Parker writes thus concerning Mr. David McGregor:—

‘He was greatly respected, and his death sincerely lamented by the people of his charge. He stood deservedly high in public estimation, as a preacher and a divine. Few, if any, then upon the stage, were considered his superiors. His praise, as a bold, faithful, successful minister, was in all the surrounding churches, and his services eagerly sought. Though not favoured with a collegiate education, yet under the private instruction of Rev. Mr. Clark, and by his great assiduity and application in the acquisition of knowledge, he became a scribe well instructed unto the Kingdom of Heaven; and was able at all times and on all occasions to bring forth out of his treasure things new and old. He was an animated and interesting preacher. His pulpit talents were considered superior to those of his father. His voice was full and commanding, his delivery solemn and impressive, and his sentiments clear and evangelical. His house of worship was usually thronged. Many from the neighbouring towns attended regularly upon his ministry. He excelled not only as a preacher but as a pastor. In the discharge of parochial duties, especially in catechising his flock, he was eminently distinguished. . . . He possessed in an eminent degree, a spirit of firmness and independence, which deterred him from shrinking from duty on account of apparent danger or difficulty.’

Mr. McGregor was married to Mary Boyd, a lady of fine personal appearance and accomplishments, who, having been early left an orphan, was brought up by his mother. She died September 28, 1793, aged seventy. They had nine children. One son, *Robert*, was aid-de-camp to General Stark, at the surrender of Burgoyne. Another son, *David*, was graduated at Dartmouth College in 1774, held the office of Captain in the Revolution, afterwards engaged in the business of teaching, and died in 1827. A third son, *James*, settled in Londonderry, was in the earlier part of his life much engaged in public business, sustaining not only the office of a magistrate, but various offices of the town, and was for some years a Representative in the General Court. He possessed a well endowed and well cultivated mind. He died much lamented on the 23d of June, 1818, aged seventy.

EBENEZER PRIME.

1719—1779.

FROM THE REV. SAMUEL I. PRIME, D. D.,

NEW YORK, April 26, 1852.

My dear Sir: I send you, agreeably to your request, the following notice, from such materials as I have been able to gather, of my venerable great-grandfather. As there is nobody now living who remembers him, I have to depend of course chiefly upon family records and traditions.

The Primes came from England,—three brothers of them, in the latter half of the seventeenth century. One settled in Rowley, Mass.; and from him descended the Primes who have been known in the mercantile circles

Upon his making what seemed penitent acknowledgments of the sin with which he was charged, the Presbytery continued his license, at the same time administering to him a sharp rebuke. After a while, he returned to Georgetown, and in June, 1750, the people renewed their call to him, and about the same time he was also invited to settle at Newcastle, Me. The Presbytery recommended both calls to his consideration; but he thought proper to decline them both. In 1751, the call from Georgetown was a second time renewed, and, in November of that year, he accepted it. Difficulties, however, arose, either on the part of the people or of the Presbytery, which prevented his becoming the pastor of that church. In 1754, he accepted a call from the church in Newcastle, and, as a matter of convenience, was ordained at Newburyport, on the 19th of September of that year. He remained at Newcastle, constantly involved in difficulties, and labouring to very little acceptance, until the latter part of the year 1758, when his dismission was finally effected. I find no trace of him afterwards.