

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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VOLUME III.

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## THOMAS READ, D. D.\*

1768—1823.

THOMAS READ was born in March, 1746, in the then Province of Maryland, but within the present limits of Chester County, Pa. His parents, John and Eleanor Read, emigrated from Ireland to this country, several years before his birth. His father was a substantial yeoman in the old Country, and a landholder and prosperous farmer in this; and the children,—six in number, were trained up under a strongly religious influence, while they enjoyed some of the best opportunities which the country afforded for the culture of their minds. One of the brothers studied medicine, settled as a practitioner in Philadelphia, and was rising rapidly to eminence, when he was swept off, in 1793, by the yellow fever. Two others migrated, soon after the Revolution, to the Western part of Pennsylvania, where they have left large and highly respectable families.

The subject of this notice was educated at the old Academy of Philadelphia, since merged in the University of Pennsylvania,—then under the Presidency of Dr. Francis Alison. After graduating, in the year 1764, he commenced his career in life as a Tutor in the Classical Academy of Newark, but a few miles from the place of his birth. That institution,—the most distinguished in the State, continued an object of great interest with him till the close of life. He was early chosen its President, and held the office ever afterwards. The cause of Christian education was always near his heart, and he laboured for it almost as earnestly as if he had had no other vocation.

In 1768, having received license to preach, he commenced officiating as a supply for a small congregation, at a place called Drawyer's Creek, in Delaware. In 1772, he received from them a unanimous call, and was regularly installed by the Presbytery as their Pastor. He found them a small and feeble band; worshipping in a log-house in the midst of the wilderness; but within about six years after his installation, they had erected a capacious brick building, and ultimately became one of the most flourishing congregations in the State. During the many years that his connection with this congregation continued, he laboured zealously through the week as a missionary, taking a circuit of from thirty to forty miles; and these labours were attended often with manifest tokens of the Divine favour. He had several invitations, during this period, to settle over congregations that would have been considered in every respect more desirable; but his strong attachment to his people led him to decline them all, until, in the year 1798, he received a call from the Second Presbyterian Church in Wilmington, De., which he thought it his duty to accept. He accordingly did accept it, and removed thither the same year.

In the year 1796, he received the degree of Doctor of Divinity from the College of New Jersey.

As he entered his new field of labour, he quickly found that it was the scene of great disorder. Political disputes were conducted with extreme rancour, and embittered much of the intercourse of society. On one occa-

\* MS. from his son, A. S. Read, Esq.

sion, not long after his settlement, a mob assembled around the church door, during the hour of service, and with the sound of drum and fife, and other tumultuous demonstrations, succeeded in interrupting the public worship. He paused in the midst of his sermon, left the pulpit, walked out of the house alone, and by the calm and solemn dignity of his appearance, joined to a kind and Christian expostulation, he succeeded in effectually dispersing the riotous assemblage. Some of the individuals concerned in this disgraceful affair, afterwards became his devoted friends.

In the war of the Revolution, he showed himself an earnest, active patriot. Early in 1776, he and forty or fifty others,—his neighbours and parishioners, fitted themselves out, shouldered their muskets, and marched to Philadelphia. Had they arrived a few days earlier, their services would have been gladly accepted; but the success which had attended the American arms at Trenton and Princeton, rendered it unnecessary that they should be enrolled.

On the 25th of August, 1777, the British army disembarked at Elk Ferry. General Washington was encamped near Stanton, about six miles below Wilmington, and nearly equidistant from the point of disembarkation of the British, and Chads Ford, where the battle was subsequently fought, on the 10th of September, about twenty miles from the camp. A smart skirmish at Couch's Bridge, between the outposts, and within four miles of Washington's encampment, gave the first intimation of the dangerous proximity of the enemy. To give battle in such a position, with our raw troops against disciplined veterans, would prove ruinous—to retreat by the high road, with a well appointed and regular army hanging on the rear, might prove more disastrous than a pitched battle. Every preparation was instantly made for departure; but how to retreat was the great question, and it demanded a speedy solution. The geographical knowledge of the immediate neighbours did not extend much beyond the limits of the contiguous farms, and the roads to the nearest markets; and no information that could be relied upon could be obtained. Between eleven and twelve o'clock at night, a council of war was called; and, while the greatest anxiety prevailed, Col. Duff, a gallant officer, then acting as one of Washington's staff, entered the room, and exclaimed instantly,—“I know the man that can extricate us.” “Mount and bring him without a moment's delay,” was the order; and immediately the Colonel was on his way to execute it. After travelling about five miles, he arrived at the house of Mr. Read, at twelve o'clock at night, roused him from his bed, and in ten minutes his horse was at the door, and he in the saddle, and both under whip and spur for the camp. In half an hour, they had gone over the whole distance, notwithstanding an exceedingly bad road,—and Mr. Read was introduced to Washington in his tent. He mapped out for the General, within a small space, the whole adjacent country, with all the cross and by-roads accurately marked; and by this means the General effected a safe retreat to the Brandywine. The above incident is related on the authority of Dr. Read himself.

Dr. Read resigned his pastoral charge in the year 1817,—the church having greatly increased in both numbers and moral influence under his ministry. After this, he preached, by request, as often as his health permitted, to the First Presbyterian Church in Wilmington, which had long been without a Pastor. In the year 1821, his right hip was partially dislocated by

a fall, and he never afterwards fully recovered the use of it. He died in great peace, June 14, 1823.

Before he was yet of age, he married in Philadelphia a very accomplished lady,—the daughter of an English gentleman by the name of Stanley. She died in 1781, after having become the mother of six children,—three sons and three daughters. He was married a second time in 1788, to Mary, daughter of Alexander Stuart, of Bohemia Manor, in the State of Maryland. By this marriage he had five children,—two sons and three daughters. The second son by the first marriage was a physician, and died in the prime of life. The eldest by the second marriage commenced the practice of Law in Lancaster, Pa., but died unexpectedly a short time after. The other sons were farmers. Dr. Read left a widow who died as she had lived, a model of Christian character, on the 11th of December, 1845, in the eighty-fourth year of her age.

FROM THE HON. KENSEY JOHNS,  
CHANCELLOR OF DELAWARE.

NEWCASTLE, February 26, 1852.

Dear Sir: I regret to say that my recollections of the Rev. Dr. Read, formerly Pastor of the Church at Wilmington, are not such as to enable me to express any opinion of *my own*, as to what he was in his various public relations. When he occasionally supplied the pulpit in the Presbyterian Church at Newcastle, he was generally the guest of my father, and was always highly esteemed and beloved by the whole family. I have always understood that he was a learned theologian, an instructive and useful preacher, and an affectionate, zealous and faithful pastor. His personal appearance I remember—it was such as was well calculated to leave an impression—like one of old, he stood above his fellows. His manners at once dignified and affectionate; his countenance expressive of intelligence and benevolence; his head covered with the wig of olden time, so becoming the aged,—altogether presented to your view the venerable minister.

Regretting that my recollections of him are so meagre, and so little to your purpose,

I am respectfully and sincerely yours,

KENSEY JOHNS.

FROM THE REV. JAMES LATTA.

PARKESBURG, Pa., April 22, 1851.

My dear Sir: It was not very long that I was in the ministry before the death of Dr. Read; but I had still some opportunities of knowing him, and my recollections and impressions, such as they are, I am very willing to communicate to you.

Dr. Read was a man of commanding appearance, of remarkably dignified manners, and altogether clerical in his deportment. He was a fine example of hospitality. His brethren were always most cordially welcomed to his house, and he never failed to make himself highly agreeable to them. Young ministers particularly received from him very special attention, and he seemed to delight in proffering them his counsel and aid in every way in his power. As a preacher, he was plain, instructive and impressive—his object evidently was not to gain popular applause, but to win souls to Christ;—not to please the fancy, but to enlighten the understanding, and improve the heart and life. And his every day deportment was a fine illustration of the truths which he preached—his example and his instructions both pointed in the same direction.



During the ministry of Dr. Read, there were several churches in the Newcastle Presbytery without a pastor. Over these he exercised a very watchful and tender care. He frequently visited them, administered to them the ordinance of the Supper, baptized their children, and encouraged and assisted their respective Sessions in the exercise of discipline. These churches reposed great confidence in him, and looked up to him with a sort of filial interest and affection. And his own church, though they regarded him with great esteem and reverence, and placed a very high estimate upon his labours, both in public and private, yet consented cheerfully that other less favoured churches in the region should share with them, to some extent, the benefit of his services. I will only add that Dr. Read was greatly respected throughout the region in which he lived, and the few who still remember him are ready to bear a grateful testimony to his substantial and enduring worth.

Yours very respectfully and affectionately,

JAMES LATTA.

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### JOHN WOODHULL, D. D.\*

1768—1824.

JOHN WOODHULL was born in Suffolk County, L. I., January 26, 1744. His father was John Woodhull,—a man of great respectability and influence in the part of the country where he lived; and his mother was Elizabeth Smith, daughter of William Smith, of St. George's Manor, L. I. The Woodhull family emigrated from Great Britain to Long Island, at an early period, and are descended from illustrious ancestors through a long line which is traced back to the Norman conquest.

The subject of this notice was fitted for College in a grammar school, under the care of the Rev. Caleb Smith,—his maternal uncle, minister at Newark Mountains, (now Orange,) N. J. In the year 1762, he entered the Freshman class in the College of New Jersey. At the age of about sixteen, just as he was commencing his preparation for College, his mind was directed with some degree of earnestness to the subject of religion; but it was not till a powerful revival occurred in College, while he was an undergraduate, that he believed himself the subject of a spiritual renovation. His exercises then, and for some time afterwards, are represented as having been of a strongly marked, even extraordinary, character; and when he went to converse with President Finley with reference to making a public profession of his faith, the President is said to have regarded his case with uncommon interest, as furnishing a remarkable illustration of the power of the Gospel.

He graduated in 1766, and almost immediately after proceeded to Fagg's Manor, for the purpose of pursuing his theological studies under the direction of the Rev. John Blair. Here he continued till the summer of 1768, when he was licensed, (August 10th,) by the Presbytery of Newcastle, to preach the Gospel. He commenced his career as a preacher with much more than usual popularity; and on one occasion about sixty people became hopefully pious, in consequence of hearing him preach at a private house.

\* MS. from his son, Rev. G. S. Woodhull.—Timlow's Hist. Sermon.