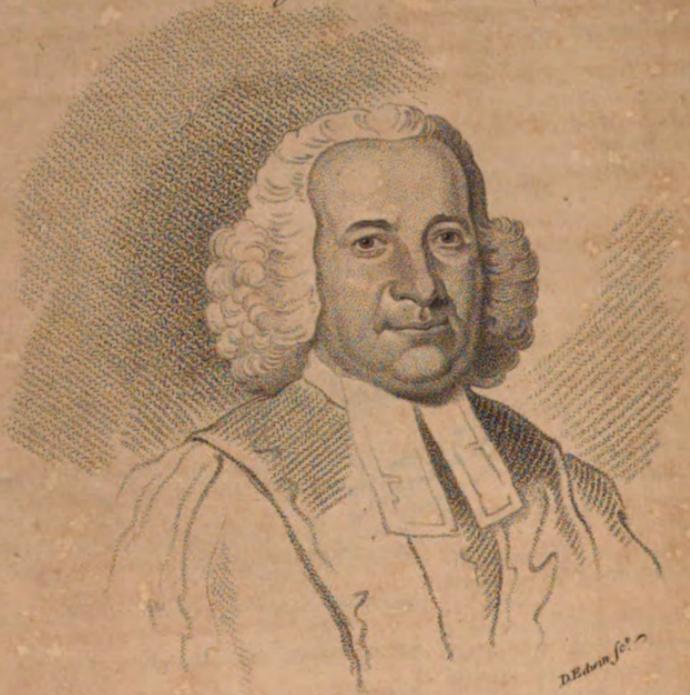


The Evangelical Intelligencer.



DOCT. S. FINLEY.

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MODERN MISSIONARY SOCIETIES.—CONTINUED.

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THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY, CONSIDERED AS A
MISSIONARY BODY.

At the time the Presbyterian Church was organized in what are now the United States, about the commencement of the eighteenth century, the country was, for the most part, thinly settled. The number of ministers being then small and the inhabitants scattered over an extensive region, many places were wholly destitute of preaching and others had it but seldom. The friends of religion saw and regretted their situation but could do little to ameliorate it. Both ministers and people were poor, and the state of the country was such as to require great attention to provide the necessaries of life. It was not therefore, till these impediments began to disappear, that those who were most earnestly intent, as the presbyterian ministers certainly were, on sending the gospel to destitute and distant parts, could carry their wishes and designs very extensively into effect. They did what they could under those circumstances, but their labours were necessarily confined to a narrow sphere.

Between the years 1740 and 1765, by the aid of the Scotch Society for diffusing christian knowledge, they were enabled to send four missionaries to the Indians.—The labours and general success of these missionaries have already been published. They likewise, during the same period, sent a number of missionaries among the white people settled on the frontiers of our country. Subsequent to this period the number of settlers increased and the prospect of usefulness extended; but the church had yet to regret its inability to send preaching among them, except in a very partial degree, until

THE LIFE OF DR. SAMUEL FINLEY.

Mr. Samuel Finley was born in the year 1715, in the county of Armagh in Ireland, and was one of seven sons who were all esteemed pious: his parents possessed the same character. They gave him such an education as their circumstances permitted, and, in a country school at some distance from home, he was early distinguished for close application to, and uncommon proficiency in his studies. He left his native country when he had attained only his 19th year, and arrived in Philadelphia on the 28th of September 1734.—It had pleased God to awaken and convert him very early in life, and by many and various dispensations of his providence to prepare him for those important stations which he afterwards filled. He first heard a sermon when he was six years old; and not long before his death was heard to say, that he well remembered the text, and that from the day on which he heard the sermon he conceived strong desires to be a minister; and accordingly, almost as soon as he was capable of forming any resolutions respecting himself, he determined to devote himself to the service of the sanctuary. With this view he spent several years after his arrival in America in completing his studies, during which he was particularly attentive to theology.

After a due course of presbyterial trials, he was licenced on the 5th of August 1740 to preach the gospel, and was ordained on the 13th of October 1742, by the Revd. Presbytery of New-Brunswick. The first part of his ministry was employed in long and fatiguing itinerations; and the records of several of the churches which he visited, contain honorable memorials of his diligence, fidelity and success. A little before this time a remarkable revival of religion had commenced, which still continued: in this Mr. Finley was a coadjutor with Messrs. Tennent, Whitefield and others, and his labours were remarkably blessed at Deerfield, Greenwich, and Cape May, in New-Jersey. He preached likewise to great acceptance for six months, as a stated supply to a congregation in Philadelphia, of which Mr. Gilbert Tennent afterwards had the pastoral charge. In June 1744 he accepted a call to Nottingham, in Maryland, on the border of Pennsylvania, where he continued near seventeen years, faithfully discharging the duties of his sacred office, and had the pleasure to see the work of the Lord prospering in his hands. During his resi-

dence at Nottingham he instituted an Academy, which acquired great reputation and attracted students even from distant parts. Mr. Finley was justly famed as a scholar, and eminently qualified as a teacher.* Under his instruction many, very many youths received the rudiments of an education, and correct moral sentiments, which have since placed them amongst the most useful and ornamental members of society.

Upon the death of President Davies, the Trustees of the College of New-Jersey elected Mr. Finley as his successor in that important office. Great were the struggles of his mind on this occasion. His love to his people, and theirs to him, were of the most tender kind, having long been nourished by the affectionate assiduities of uninterrupted friendship; but a prospect of more extensive usefulness, and in that way in which Providence had already so remarkably succeeded his labours, inclined him to think it his duty to remove: he therefore accepted the invitation given him by the Trustees, and removed to Princeton in July 1761. Upon this event the hopes of the well wishers to the College revived, and the clouds which had so long hung over that nursery of religion and learning began to be dissipated. Raised expectations were formed by Mr. Finley's friends, and they were not disappointed. Under his care the College flourished and acquired additional reputation, and his own fame became much more extensive: he was known in various parts of Europe, and corresponded with many eminent men there: among them was Dr. Samuel Chandler, of London, who in all his letters evinced the most sincere esteem for this his distant friend. Such was the opinion his friends in Scotland entertained of him as a divine and a scholar, that, without his knowledge, they procured for him the degree of Doctor in Divinity, from the University of Glasgow: he received his Diploma in 1763.

Unremitted attention to the duties of his station very sensibly affected Dr. Finley's health, and produced a fixed obstruction in his liver, which put a period to his life on the 17th of July, 1766, in the 51st year of his age, at Philadelphia, whither he had gone for medical assistance.

He was twice married. His first wife was Miss Sarah Hall, a lady of an amiable character, who was truly an help meet

* *He possessed great knowledge of the human heart, and although strict as a disciplinarian, he never failed to secure the love of his pupils.*

for him ; by her he had eight children, of whom one only is now living. She died in the year 1760, and in 1761 Dr. Finley married Miss Ann Clarkson, a daughter of Mr. Matthew Clarkson (formerly an eminent merchant in the city of New York) and a lineal descendant from David Clarkson B. D. who was ejected for non conformity, in England, in 1671. This lady still survives.

As a divine Dr. Finley was in sentiment a Calvinist. He was a scribe instructed unto the kingdom of Heaven. His sermons were not hasty productions, but filled with solid good sense and well digested sentiment, expressed in a style pleasing to the man of science, yet perfectly intelligible by the more illiterate : they were calculated to inform the ignorant, to alarm the careless and secure, to comfort and edify the saint, and to make the sinner in zion tremble.

As a man he was remarkable for uncommon sweetness of temper and polite behaviour ; given to hospitality, charitable without ostentation, diligent in the performance of the relative duties of life, and in all things shewing himself a pattern of good works.

When the Dr. first applied to the physicians in Philadelphia, he had no apprehension that his dissolution was so near as it afterwards appeared : for he observed to his friends ; 'if my work is done I am ready. I do not desire to live a day longer than I can work for God : but I cannot think this is the case as yet : God has much for me to do before I depart hence.'

About a month before he died, his physicians informed him that his disease appeared to them incurable : upon which he expressed entire resignation to the divine will, and from that time till his death was employed in setting his house in order.—On being told by one of his physicians that according to present appearances he could live but a few days longer, he lifted up his eyes, and exclaimed 'then welcome Lord Jesus.'

On the sabbath preceding his death, his brother-in-law, Dr. Clarkson, (one of his physicians) told him that he perceived a visible alteration from which he apprehended his death was at hand. 'Then' said he 'may the Lord bring me near himself. I have been waiting with a Canaan hunger for the promised land. I have often wondered that God suffered me to live, I have more wondered that ever he called me to be a minister of his word. He has often afforded me much strength, which though I have abused, he has returned in mercy. O faithful are the promises of God ! O that I

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could see him as I have seen him heretofore in his sanctuary! Although I have earnestly desired death, as the hireling pants for the evening shade, yet will I wait all the days of my appointed time. I have often struggled with principalities and powers, and have been brought almost to despair.—Lord, let it suffice.’ Here he sat up, and closed his eyes and prayed fervently that God would shew him his glory before he should depart hence:—that he would enable him to endure patiently to the end, and particularly, that he might be kept from dishonouring the ministry. Then he resumed his discourse, and spoke as follows: ‘I can truly say, that I have loved the service of God. I know not in what language to speak of my own unworthiness. I have been undutiful. I have honestly endeavoured to act for God, but with much weakness and corruption.’ Here he lay down and continued to speak in broken sentences, as follows, ‘A christian’s death is the best part of his existence. The Lord has made provision for the whole way; provision for the soul and provision for the body. O that I could recollect sabbath blessings. The Lord hath given me many souls as crowns of my rejoicing. Blessed be God, eternal rest is at hand. Eternity is but long enough to enjoy my God. This, this has animated me in my severest studies, I was ashamed to take rest here. O that I could be filled with the fulness of God! That fulness which fills Heaven!’—Being asked if it were in his choice whether to live or die, which he would choose: he replied, ‘to die; though I cannot but say, I feel the same strait that St. Paul did, that he knew not which to choose; for me to live is Christ, but to die is great gain: but should God by a miracle prolong my life, I will still continue to serve him. His service has ever been sweet to me. I have loved it much. I have tried my master’s yoke and will never shrink my neck from it. ‘His yoke is easy and his burden light.’ He then put his hand to his mouth and pulling out a loose tooth, said, ‘here is one of the pillars of the tabernacle; the whole frame will soon fall to pieces.’ ‘You are more cheerful and vigorous, sir,’ said one of the company; ‘Yes,’ he replied, ‘I rise or fall, as eternal rest seems nearer or farther off.’ It being observed to him, that he always used the expression, ‘dear Lord,’ in his prayers, he answered, ‘O! he is very dear—very precious indeed!—How pretty it is for a minister to die on the sabbath! I expect to spend the remaining part of this sabbath in Heaven.’ One of the company said to him, ‘You will soon be joined to a blessed society: you will forever hold converse with

Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, with the spirits of the just made perfect, with old friends, and many old fashioned people. 'Yes sir,' he replied with a smile, 'but they are a most polite people now.'—He expressed great gratitude to friends around him, and said, 'may the Lord repay you for your tenderness to me; may he bless you abundantly, not only with temporal but with spiritual blessings.' Turning to his wife, he said, 'I expect, my dear, to see you shortly in glory.' Then, addressing himself to the whole company, he said, 'O that each of you may experience what, blessed be God, I do, when you come to die; may you have the pleasure in a dying hour, that with faith and patience, zeal and sincerity, you have endeavoured to serve the Lord; that each of you may be impressed, as I have been, with God's word; looking upon it as substantial, and not only fearing, but being unwilling to offend against it.' Upon seeing a member of the second presbyterian church in Philadelphia, he said, 'I have often preached and prayed among you, my dear sir, and the doctrines I preached to you are now my support; and, blessed be God, they are without a flaw. May the Lord bless and preserve your church; he designs good for it yet, I trust.' To a person from Princeton, he said, 'Give my love to the people at Princeton, and tell them that I am going to die, and that I am not afraid to die.'—He would sometimes cry out, 'The Lord Jesus, take care of his cause in the world!'

Upon awaking the next morning, he exclaimed, 'O! what a disappointment I have met with!—I expected this morning to have been in heaven!'—Great weakness prevented his speaking much this day, but what he did say was the language of triumph.

On the following morning, with a pleasing smile on his countenance, and with a strong voice, he cried out, 'O I shall triumph over every foe! The Lord hath given me the victory! I exult! I triumph! O that I could see untainted purity! Now I know that it is impossible that faith should not triumph over earth and hell: I think I have nothing to do but to die; yet, perhaps I have:—Lord shew me my task!' After expressing some fears lest he did not endeavour to preserve his remaining life through eagerness to depart, and being told that he did nothing inconsistent with self preservation, he said, 'Lord Jesus, into thy hands I commend my spirit, I do it with confidence;—I do it with full assurance. I know thou wilt keep that which I have committed to thee. I have been dreaming too fast of the time of my departure, for I

find it does not come : but the Lord is faithful, and will not tarry beyond his appointed time.'

When one who attended him, told him that his pulse grew weaker, he cried out, 'that is well.'

In the afternoon the Rev. Mr. Spencer called to see him, and told him, 'I have come, dear sir, to see you confirm, by facts, the gospel you have been preaching; pray how do you feel?' To which he replied, 'full of triumph! I triumph through Christ! Nothing clips my wings but the thoughts of my dissolution being prolonged. O that it were to-night! My very soul thirsts for eternal rest.' Mr. Spencer asked him what he saw in eternity to excite such vehement desires in his soul? he said, 'I see the eternal love and goodness of God:— I see the fulness of the Mediator:— I see the love of Jesus:— O! to be dissolved and be with him! I long to be clothed with the complete righteousness of Christ.' He then desired Mr. Spencer to pray with him before they parted, and told him, 'I have gained the victory over the devil; pray to God to preserve me from evil, to keep me from dishonouring his great name in this critical hour, and to support me with his presence in my passage through the valley of the shadow of death.'

He spent the remaining part of the evening in bidding farewell to, and blessing his friends, and exhorting such of his children as were with him.—He would frequently cry out, 'why move the tardy hours so slow?'

The next day, July 16, terminated his conflict. His speech failed him: although he made many efforts to speak, he could seldom do it so distinctly as to be understood. A friend desired him to give some token whereby his friends might know whether he still continued to triumph; whereupon he lifted up his hand, and said, 'Yes.'—In the afternoon he spake several sentences, but little could be collected from them. Some of the last words he spake concerning himself were, 'after one or two engagements more, the conflict will be over.' In the evening, about 9 o'clock, he fell into a sound sleep, and appeared to be much more free from pain than he had been for many days before. He continued to sleep without changing his position, till about one o'clock, when he expired without a sigh or a groan.

During his whole sickness, he was not heard to utter a repining word; and in all the farewells he bid his friends and relations, he was never seen to shed a single tear, or exhibit any mark of sorrow.

He was interred in the second presbyterian church in the city of Philadelphia, adjoining his once intimate friend, the Rev. Gilbert Tennent. The excessive heat prevented his being removed to Princeton, where the dust of his predecessors lay, but many of the students came from thence to pay the last tribute of respect to the remains of him, whom living, they admired and loved. Eight of them carried the corpse to the grave; and a sermon suited to the occasion was preached by the Rev. Richard Treat of Abingdon.

A Tomb Stone, with an English inscription covers his grave in Philadelphia; and at Princeton, the Trustees of the college of New-Jersey have erected a Cenotaph to his memory, with an inscription in Latin.

THE PLAGIARIST.

No II.

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The next thing we are to consider is, what sort of perfection this is, or what are some of the special characters of it.

Here the attention of my readers is requested to some pleasing speculations, which are agreeable to the word of God and to the nature and reason of things.

It is such a perfection as admits of great variety of employments and pleasures, according to the various turn and genius of each particular spirit—That the mind of every man here on earth has a different turn of genius and peculiar manner of thought, cannot be denied—And why should not every pious mind or spirit carry to heaven with it so much of that turn and manner as is natural and innocent?

God the great Creator hath seemed to delight himself in a rich variety of productions in all his worlds which we are acquainted with. Behold the overflowing riches of his wisdom, which are laid out on this earthly globe on which we tread—and why may we not imagine the same variety and riches overspreading all those upper worlds, which we call planets or stars?