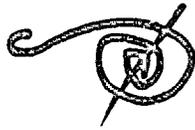
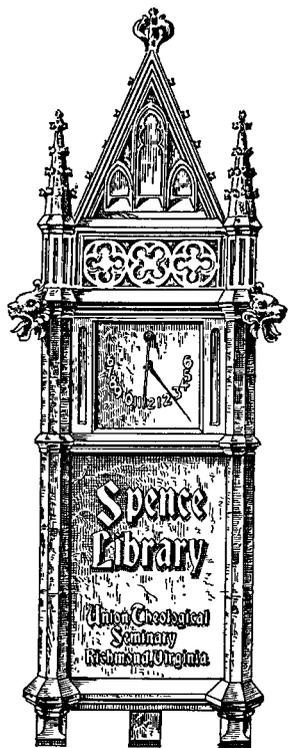


Samuel Davies  
before  
the  
King's Council



W. H. T. Squires.

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The Author

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SAMUEL DAVIES

*before*

The King's Council

*for*

The Colony and Ancient  
Dominion of Virginia

April 14, 1747

*by*

W. H. T. SQUIRES, M.A., D.D., Litt.D.

*Compliments of  
W. H. T. Squires*

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The Governor's Palace  
Williamsburg

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ADDRESS TO THE  
CONGREGATION OF HOLMES PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

April 16, 1946.

It is to congratulate you upon the completion of a full century of service for Our Lord Jesus Christ in the County of Northampton; and, as your Centennial falls almost upon the Bi-Centennial of organized Presbyterianism in the Colony of Virginia, this day carries an added significance. The Presbytery of East Hanover organized Holmes Church in 1846; and our spiritual father, Samuel Davies, received a license to preach in Hanover County, April 14, 1747. This date has especial significance to the members of Holmes Presbyterian Church, for the church and practically every home in the congregation are located upon original grants made to five successive generations of the Custis family. John Custis, IV, of Arlington was your representative in the King's Council for Virginia. Had he not agreed and permitted the preaching of the Gospel by a Presbyterian in Hanover County, a license to Samuel Davies would not have been granted. This story, therefore, has a local as well as a nation-wide significance.

By the plastic power of imagination we must journey to the colorful Colonial Capital of the Colony, April 14, 1747; as, at ten o'clock, a youth approaches the ornate Governor's Place along the green sward of the Palace Parkway. His age is 23½, his clothes are homespun, his face is pale, for he suffered a distressing attack of tuberculosis on the journey hither. He came by the Eastern Shore of Maryland, where gracious revivals were sweeping the countryside; and, when his strength revived, he crossed our great Bay to York.

It must have been with reluctance and embarrassment that he passed under the Arms of Great Britain over the gateway and raised the brass knocker. A porter, dressed in satin and full regalia even to silver buckles on his shoes, opened the door. With that quick appraisal, characteristic of the typical Virginian Negro, he judged that the caller was merely a farmer's son; which, to be sure, he was. His civility was frigid, rather than cordial; but, with a slight nod, he opened the door. The young man entered:

"I have an appointment with the Governor at ten this morning."

(Be it known that I was not present with a reporter, and while I do not guarantee the exact words of this interview, I insist that some such conversation must and did take place as here recorded. In fact, all such applications followed established precedent.)

The porter led the youth, as I presume, to the first door to the left of the magnificent hall, which terminated at the ornate stairs and the ball-room beyond—familiar to all who have visited the reconstructed Palace.

The porter announced:

"A man to see the Governor."

He did not say "A gentleman."

The visitor entered and faced the most distinguished men on this Continent, each of whom was appointed to this senate by the King of England.

Sir William Gooch, the able Governor, sat at the head of a long table. Dr. William Dawson, President of William and Mary College and Clerk of the Council, sat at the foot. Between them were Colonels, every one of whom is well remembered in Virginia. Each has left a mark upon the Colonial history of Commonwealth and Nation. Let us meet them:

Colonel John Robinson, who later exclaimed to another young man before the Council:

"Sit down, Mr. Washington, your modesty is equalled only by your merit."

Colonel William Nelson of York Hall was the son of "Scotch Tom" and the father of Thomas Nelson, Jr., the war Governor of Virginia, whose effigy stands under the equestrian statue of Washington in the Capitol Square, Richmond.

Colonel John Grymes, whose daughter Lucy married Light-Horse Harry Lee, the father of Robert E. Lee (born of his second wife, Anne Carter.)

Colonel John Blair of Williamsburg, whose son, John Blair, was appointed by the First President, the first member of the first Supreme Court.

Colonel Lewis Burwell, whose family name was given to Burwell's Bay, near Smithfield.

Colonel Philip Lightfoot, perhaps the wealthiest man in the Colony.

Colonel Thomas Lee of Stratford, the father of Richard Henry Lee and of four other sons almost as distinguished.

Colonel John Custis of Arlington, whose son, John Custis V, married Martha Dandridge (later Mrs. George Washington), whose grandson stood with Washington at the Yorktown surrender. His son, George Washington Parke Custis, built Arlington House and transferred the Arlington name from Northampton County to the Potomac. There his daughter, Mary Randolph, married young Lieutenant Robert E. Lee. Arlington today is the Westminster Abbey of our country, whose dome is the star-lit heavens.

Colonel William Fairfax, whose daughter, Anne, married Lawrence Washington, and whose home was Mount Vernon.

The Governor remarked:

"Gentlemen, I invited this young man to meet you, that he may present his request to the King's Council this morning. We will hear you, Mr. . . . . I believe I do not recall your name."

The visitor answered:

"And, may it please Your Excellency, my name is Samuel Davies."

"Yes, to be sure," replied the Governor.

Every Colonel looked up to the youth in homespun, in mild astonishment. He had used precisely the correct words in addressing the Governor. Only two Colonial Governors were to be addressed as "Your Excellency"—those of Massachusetts and Virginia. Only on rare occasions did a petitioner use the correct term. In addressing the Governor in Virginia or the King in Buckingham Palace, the correct form began with the conjunction, "And," a relic of the old Saxon "An," meaning "If."

Again the Colonels were astonished at the music of the young man's detonation. He had the richest voice, as he was to become by far the greatest orator in Colonial America. Behind him for a thousand years Welsh bards struck their harps and sung their odes upon the slopes of Snowden.

The Governor replied:

"Yes, to be sure, Mr. Davis, I mean, Mr. Davies, just what is your request?"

The slip was slight. Davis is English; Davies, Welsh. The late Dr. Wm. Thornton Whitsett discovered the interesting fact that a cousin of Samuel Davies secured a grant of land in Christian

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County, Kentucky, and named a son Jefferson. That son, a brilliant orator in the Senate, became the President of the Confederate States.

“I request a license to preach the Gospel on four plantations in Virginia: The plantations of Samuel Morris, Stephen Lacy and David Rice in Hanover; and the plantation of Thomas Watkins in Henrico.”

That brought a painful silence and many a frown. Every Colonel was strong for the Established Church, even if weak on experimental religion.

One of them replied:

“The Gospel is preached in two churches by two rectors every Sunday in each of the two counties, and preached very well. We have provided also several chapels-of-ease. I do not see that the people of Virginia need any dissenting Gospel from visiting clergymen. Just what sect do you belong to, Young Man?”

“May it please Your Honor, I am a Presbyterian, and I have my papers of ordination from New Castle Presbytery, if you will accept them.”

“No, we are not interested in New Castle, nor its Presbytery, whatever that is.”

The Governor was tactful.

“Gentlemen,” he said, “these Presbyterians are not such evil folk. Colonel Nelson’s noble father, ‘Scotch Tom,’ was a Presbyterian. I was reared a Presbyterian myself in Yarmouth, Norfolk-shire. Our Gracious King, May God Bless Him, is by law a Presbyterian, when he enters Scotland; and his Majesty, William III of Glorious Memory, was a Dutch Presbyterian. I do not know how long this young man will last. Most non-conformists last only a short time, and he does not look very strong. Perhaps he can do some good among us. Do I hear any dissenting voice?”

After a brief silence:

“As there is no objection, Mr. Davies, you may call on Dr. Dawson at his office in the College this afternoon and receive your license. Mr. Davies, we bid you good-day—and now we will return to the former subject, Gentlemen.”

Samuel Davies won! His very weakness was his strength!

Twenty-nine years later, in the Capitol at Williamsburg, only a few squares to the east, the First Constitution of Virginia was written, and granted absolute freedom of worship to all men. Eleven years later in the City of Philadelphia the First Constitution of the United States was written, and James Madison, an alumnus of Princeton, certainly had the Virginia document before him. Into that Constitution the same provision, freedom of worship for all men, was written.

It may not be accurate to claim too much credit, but it cannot be denied that the Presbytery of Hanover, and Samuel Davies, who organized it, made a contribution to this consummation so devoutly to be wished.

W. H. T. SQUIRES.

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