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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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BY WILLIAM B. SPRAGUE, D. D.

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VOLUME IV.
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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.

ROBERT HAMILTON BISHOP, D. D.*

1802—1855.

ROBERT HAMILTON BISHOP, son of William and Margaret (Hamilton) Bishop, was born in the parish of Whitburn, Linlithgowshire, North Britain, on the 26th of July, 1777. Having early evinced a fondness for books, as well as a mind of more than ordinary vigour, he entered on a course of classical study, and in November, 1794, became a member of the University of Edinburgh. After completing his course at the University, he entered the Divinity Hall at Selkirk, under the Rev. George Lawson, in August, 1798. Here he passed through the prescribed course of theological study, and on the 28th of June, 1802, was licensed to preach the Gospel by the Associate Burgher Presbytery of Perth.

In the spring and summer of 1801, the Rev. (afterwards Dr.) John M. Mason, of the city of New York, visited the Burgher Synod of Scotland, as the Commissioner from the Associate Reformed Synod of North America, partly with a view to obtain a supply of preachers for the American Synod. Mr. Bishop, being at that time a student under Professor Lawson, was casually introduced to Dr. Mason, and the brief interview which he had with him, led, some two months after, to a partial engagement to accompany Dr. M. to America, provided the Synod, at whose disposal he was, should so direct.

The Synod met in April, 1802; and, under their special order, he was licensed to preach with a view to his engaging in the contemplated mission. In September following, he, with five other ordained ministers, embarked with Dr. Mason at Greenock, and arrived at New York before the close of October. Having attended a meeting of the Associate Reformed Synod, which took place shortly after his arrival, he set out with two other clergymen for Kentucky; but, being left to supply two new congregations in Adams County, O., for two months, he did not arrive there until March, 1803. He had been appointed to labour in Kentucky by the casting vote of the Moderator of the Synod,—what was then called the Second Congregation of New York having made application for his services. Five years afterwards, the same congregation sent him a pressing invitation to return to them, which, however, he did not accept.

In the summer of 1803, he had three calls presented to him in due form; but that which he finally accepted, was from Ebenezer in Jessamine County, which was connected with New Providence in Mercer County. The two Congregations united contained about thirty families spread over a tract of country at least fifteen miles square; and, as the Kentucky River and the Kentucky Cliffs intervened between the two places of worship, the two Churches were not expected to worship together much oftener than twice in a year. About the same time a Professorship in Transylvania University was offered him; and, as he thought it practicable to combine the duties of that office with those which he owed to his pastoral charge, which was within a half-day's ride of Lexington, and as something of this kind seemed neces-

* Presbyterian of the West, 1853.—Blake's Biog. Dict.—MSS. from Dr. Bishop and his son Professor R. H. Bishop.

sary to secure to him an adequate support, he determined to accept, and did accept, the Professorship.

Having accepted the call from the above mentioned Churches in the autumn of 1804, subjects were given him for his trial discourses to be delivered in the spring; but, at the spring meeting, he was informed that he could not be admitted to trials for ordination, till he should dissolve his connection with the Transylvania University. The reasons assigned for this were that the Presbytery had the exclusive disposal of his time; and that his duties in connection with the University were of such a nature, as to interfere greatly with his usefulness to the Associate Reformed Church. This brought him into unpleasant relations with his Presbytery, and ultimately he was regularly prosecuted upon a charge of disobedience, the result of which was that he received a Presbyterial rebuke, by which the matter was considered as judicially settled. The case, however, being subsequently referred to the Synod, it was decided that the resignation of his place in the University should not be an indispensable condition of his ordination, and that the Presbytery of Kentucky should proceed to ordain him as soon as circumstances would permit. This decision was given in June, 1807; but, owing to certain circumstances, his ordination did not take place till June, 1808. Thus, for nearly four years, he was virtually under ecclesiastical process; and, though only a probationer, had yet the charge of two congregations to which he preached alternately every Sabbath,—the one fifteen miles, the other twenty-seven miles, from the place of his residence.

For some time after his ordination, Mr. Bishop seems to have exercised his ministry with a good degree of comfort and success. In the year 1810, the Presbytery appointed him, in connection with the Rev. Adam Rankin, of polemic notoriety, to prepare an Address to the Churches in the form of a Pastoral Letter, designed to illustrate the obligation of sustaining Christian institutions, and especially the ministry of the Gospel. The document was written by Mr. Bishop, assented to by Mr. Rankin, and passed without opposition by the Presbytery; though it gave great offence in certain quarters, and especially in Mr. Bishop's own congregation. The Presbytery, with a view to prevent erroneous impressions, and to avert threatening evil, directed their Clerk to address an official Letter to the Ebenezer Congregation, distinctly stating that the offensive Circular was to be considered the act of the Presbytery, and not of an individual. This Letter Mr. Bishop caused to be printed, with some explanatory remarks of his own, in the close of which he made an allusion to the conduct of Mr. Rankin, which he afterwards pronounced "imprudent and unnecessary," and which occasioned him great embarrassment in his ecclesiastical relations. His original connection with the Pastoral Letter led to the dissolution of his relation to the Ebenezer Congregation, in October, 1814.

In the autumn of 1811, Mr. Bishop entered into an arrangement with two or three other clergymen for conducting a monthly religious publication, to be called the Evangelical Record and Western Review. This was the first thing of the kind ever attempted in Kentucky, and the second, West of the Mountains. The work, however, owing chiefly to a deficiency in the subscription, was discontinued at the close of the second year.

In the second volume of this work, Mr. Bishop published, as part of the history of the state of religion in Kentucky, an article entitled "the origin of the Rankinites,"—which gave great offence in various circles, and

which he himself subsequently regarded as extremely ill-judged and unfortunate. After considerable private and extra-judicial conference on the subject, a regular judicial inquiry was entered into by his Presbytery, and in October 1815, he was brought to trial on a charge of slander, the result of which was that he was regularly suspended from the ministry. An appeal to the General Synod from the sentence was immediately taken. The Synod met in Philadelphia in May, 1816, and, on an examination of the case presented by documents, they decided that Mr. Bishop should be publicly rebuked by the Presbytery for the offensive publications; that the Presbytery should use means to bring the parties immediately concerned into harmonious relations with each other, and that if this could not be effected, there should be a regular trial instituted, and that the Presbytery should make one of the parties the prosecutor and the other the defendant; and that, in the mean time, the sentence of suspension passed by the Presbytery was reversed. Nothing, however, was satisfactorily accomplished under this decision, and the case came again before the Synod, in 1817. At this meeting a committee was appointed to proceed to Kentucky to take whatever depositions might be considered necessary; but that committee, after some correspondence with the parties, and others concerned, concluded not to fulfil their appointment. A Synodical Commission was therefore appointed in 1818, to go to Kentucky and adjudicate the case, subject to the review of the next Synod. This Commission, consisting of John M. Mason, Ebenezer Dickey, and John Linn, ministers, and Silas E. Weir, an elder from Philadelphia, proceeded to Lexington in September following, and in the execution of their trust, made Bishop the prosecutor, and Rankin the defendant. The latter claimed his legal ten days to prepare for his defence; but when the time had expired, he declined the jurisdiction of the Court. The trial, however, went on in his absence, and the decision was "that the prosecutor should be publicly rebuked for the publications he had issued, and that the defendant, being convicted of lying and slander, be, as he hereby is, suspended from the Gospel ministry." It is honourable to Mr. Bishop, considering the relations into which he was brought with Mr. Rankin, that he has left the following testimony concerning him:—"Mr. Rankin, with all his bitterness on particular subjects, and on particular occasions, was also, in all other matters, and on all other occasions, a kind hearted, benevolent man."

Mr. Bishop's twenty-one years' connection with the Transylvania University was marked by no serious difficulties or disagreeable circumstances, so far as he was personally or officially concerned. Upwards of twenty young men, who were more or less under his special care during this period, afterwards entered the ministry, and several of them rose to eminence.

During one of the three years in which he considered himself as virtually suspended from the ministry, he devoted nearly all his Sabbaths to the instruction of the negroes, and organized the first Sabbath Schools ever opened in Lexington for their benefit. He has been heard to say that this was one of the most agreeable enterprises in which he ever engaged; and that in no other year of his residence in Kentucky had he so much evidence of the gracious presence of the Holy Spirit in connection with his labours.

In October, 1819, Mr. Bishop, having dissolved his connection with the Associate Reformed Church, joined the West Lexington Presbytery, in connection with the General Assembly. From 1820 to 1823, he officiated

as stated supply to the Church in Lexington, which had been gathered by the labours of the Rev. James M'Chord; and his connection with this Church he seems to have considered as highly favourable to both his comfort and usefulness. In the autumn of 1824, he accepted the Presidency of Miami University, Oxford, O., and was inaugurated on the 30th of March, 1825. Here he found a few Christian people who had been under the care of the Rev. James Hughes, for some years Principal of the grammar school in that place; and these he gathered and formed into a Presbyterian Church, and preached to them regularly on the Sabbath in the College Chapel, until the year 1831, when, as the result of a revival in which Dr. Blackburn was a principal instrument, the Church gathered so much strength that they undertook to build a place of worship and call a Pastor.

In 1825, he was honoured with the degree of Doctor of Divinity from the College of New Jersey.

In the great controversy which divided the Presbyterian Church in 1838, Dr. Bishop's sympathy and action were with the New School.

In 1841, he resigned the Presidency of Miami University, but held the Professorship of History and Political Science, until the autumn of 1844, when his connection with the institution ceased. He then removed to Pleasant Hill,—a beautiful spot in the immediate neighbourhood of Cincinnati, where there was already an Academy, which, partly at least through his agency, was now enlarged into a College, under the name of the "Farmer's College." Here he remained actively and usefully employed till the close of life.

Dr. Bishop preached regularly in the chapel to the students as long as he retained the Presidency of the University, but after that, had no stated charge. He preached, however, very frequently, during his subsequent years; and his last sermon was preached on the 15th of April, 1855, but two weeks before his death. As he left his house to preach it, he distinctly told his wife that it would be his last. He heard his classes as usual on Thursday, and was just going to the College on Friday morning, when his strength failed, so that he was no longer capable of making any effort. He lingered till five o'clock, Sabbath morning, (April 29th,) his usual hour of rising, and then died, as he had often expressed a wish to die—"in the harness."

On the 25th of August, 1802, just as he was on the eve of embarking for America, he was married to Ann Ireland, by whom he had eight children,—five sons and three daughters. All his sons were graduates of Miami University. Two of them became clergymen, and one is a Professor in the University at which he was educated. Mrs. Bishop survived her husband but two weeks.

The following is a list of Dr. Bishop's publications:—Sermons on various subjects, 1808. [This was the first volume of Sermons printed West of the Mountains.] Memoirs of David Rice; with an Appendix, 1824. Elements of Logic; or a Summary of the general principles and different modes of reasoning, 1833. Sketches of the Philosophy of the Bible, 1833. Elements of the Science of government, 1839. The Western Peacemaker, 1839. He published also several Occasional Sermons and Addresses, among which was a Sermon on the death of the Rev. James M'Chord, 1820, and the Address at his Inauguration as President of Miami University, 1825. He contributed also liberally to several periodicals.

FROM THE REV. J. M. MATHEWS, D. D.,
CHANCELLOR OF THE UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK.

NEW YORK, July 6, 1857.

My dear Sir: I cannot refuse your request for my recollections of Dr. Bishop, though my limited acquaintance with him will not allow me to attempt any thing like a minute analysis of his character. The first time that I remember to have seen him was while I was a student in the Theological Seminary of the Associate Reformed Church in this city, when he was present, at an examination,—perhaps as one of the superintendents of the institution. I subsequently met him several times at Dr. Mason's, and occasionally heard him preach on his visits to the city, and in later years he corresponded with me in reference to some objects of historical interest. In addition to this, we had many common friends, with whose estimate of his character I was familiar; so that I have a pretty distinct, and I presume, tolerably correct, idea of his leading characteristics.

In his outward appearance there was nothing specially attractive. He was every way a large, strongly built man, with great muscular energy, and I should suppose great power of physical endurance. His manners were rather plain and direct than cultivated or graceful. He had a very strongly marked Scottish accent, and could not open his lips without revealing his national origin. He had the reputation of being somewhat reserved, but I always found him social and agreeable. And yet, on one account, I must have seen him at a disadvantage; for it was almost always at Dr. Mason's house; and wherever *he* was—no matter who else might be present—he not only gave the lead to the conversation, but generally threw into the shade—I might almost say—the most brilliant minds with which he came in contact. But even in his company, I think, Dr. Bishop's presence was always felt as a source of both pleasure and edification.

Judging of the character of Dr. Bishop's preaching from the few sermons I heard from him, I should say that he was an admirable specimen of a Scotch Secession preacher. Those sermons, I remember, took a very wide range of thought, scarcely stopping short of an epitome of the entire system of Theology; but they were marked by great perspicuity, discrimination, and logical correctness; and in each case the discussion was closed with a direct practical application, bringing the whole to bear upon the heart and conscience. His manner, though without any thing of oratorical grace, was bold and earnest, and well fitted to give effect to the truths which he uttered. Altogether, the character of his preaching must, I think, have been such as to quicken the intellects, as well as improve the hearts, of all who attentively listened to it.

Dr. Bishop, as I have been assured by those who had the best opportunity of knowing, was a man of an uncommonly devout and spiritual habit of mind. He possessed a naturally excitable temper, and would sometimes speak unadvisedly with his lips, and even indulge in a tone of undue severity; but a single moment's reflection would fill him with regret and penitence, and bring from him every acknowledgment and apology that could be desired. It was a principle to which he rigidly adhered never to let the sun go down upon his wrath. His life was a somewhat eventful one; and he passed through some scenes of severe ecclesiastical conflict; but I am not aware that his character is marred by the semblance of a stain.

Dr. Bishop has a special claim to be regarded as a public benefactor, on account of the important services which he rendered to the cause of education. He was not only a very accomplished and thorough scholar, but had an admirable tact at communicating what he knew to others; and his numerous pupils in the different institutions with which he was connected, are said to have regarded

him with the highest respect and admiration. I suppose it may safely be said that he had a more important agency in directing and advancing the educational interests of the West, than any other man who lived during the same period.

I cannot forbear to add that, according to that standard which identifies genius with an illegible handwriting, Dr. Bishop was undoubtedly one of the greatest geniuses of the age. In this respect he was, I think, more than a match for his illustrious countryman and contemporary, Dr. Chalmers. Even those most familiar with his chirography would be obliged to take more than a single session for the deciphering of one of his letters; and sometimes, after they had tasked their faculties to the utmost, there would remain passages more hopelessly mysterious than if they had been written in Chinese or Arabic.

Most affectionately yours,

J. M. MATHEWS.

JOHN HOLT RICE, D. D.*

1803—1831.

JOHN HOLT RICE, a son of Benjamin and Catharine (Holt) Rice, was born near New London, Bedford County, Va., November 28, 1777. His father was a lawyer by profession, a shrewd, sensible man, and a ruling elder in the Presbyterian Church. His mother was a lady of cultivated mind, gentle disposition, and exemplary piety. He was named John Holt, after his mother's brother, who was an intelligent and worthy clergyman of the Church of England. He was a weakly child from his birth; but when he was about two years old, he had a very severe illness, and at one time was supposed to be actually dying. He, however, revived, and, contrary to all expectation, began to recover; whereupon his good uncle, the clergyman, expressed his confident conviction that Providence had spared him for an important end, and earnestly charged his mother to educate him with reference to it, promising her such assistance as he might be able to render. As the faculties of the child began to unfold, it was found that he had a very decided passion for books; and before he was four years old, he had read a considerable part of the Bible, and all Watts' Psalms and Hymns. He used also, in imitation of his uncle, to read portions of the Church service to children around him, both white and black, telling them that, when he grew to be a man, he would be a preacher.

At the age of about eight, he went to live with his uncle, Parson Holt, who had opened a school for boys in the County of Bottetourt; and here he began to learn Latin; but his uncle, in consequence of the failure of his health, soon gave up his school, and, after about a year's absence, John returned to his father. He was then sent, for a while, to another teacher, the Rev. James Mitchel, and afterwards to two or three others, whose names are forgotten. About this time, his mind became deeply impressed with the subject of religion, and the change in his conversation and deportment evinced that he had become a true disciple of Christ.

* Maxwell's Memoir of Dr. Rice.—MS. from Mrs. Dr. Rice.