

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 ROBERT CARTER & BROTHERS,

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District of New York.

"I never had the happiness to hear him in the sacred desk. In prayer, I am sure he appeared humble, solemn, rational and importunate, as a creature,—a sinner in the presence of God.

"In the charter of the College of New Jersey, he was nominated one of the Trustees; and but few, invested with the same trust, discharged it with so much zeal, diligence, and alacrity. His heart was set upon its prosperity; he exerted himself in this service, nor did he forget it in his last moments.

"The Church has lost a judicious minister, and, as we hope, a sincere Christian; the world has lost an inoffensive, useful member of society; this town an agreeable, peaceable, benevolent inhabitant; the College of New Jersey a father; and I have lost a friend."

AARON BURR.*

1736—1757.

AARON BURR was a descendant of the Rev. Jonathan Burr, who migrated to New England in 1639, and was, for some time, pastor of the church in Dorchester, Mass. He was the youngest son of Daniel Burr, of Upper Meadows, Fairfield, Conn., where he was born on the 4th of January, 1715–16. His early developments indicated a mind of uncommon power and versatility. He was graduated at Yale College in 1735, having been, during his whole course, distinguished for his proficiency, in both the languages and the sciences. He remained in College, a resident graduate on the Berkeley foundation, for one year; and, during this period, his mind underwent a revolution in respect to religion, of which the following account was found, after his decease, among his private papers:—

"This year (1736) God saw fit to open my eyes, and show me what a miserable creature I was. Till then I had spent my life in a dream; and as to the great design of my being, had lived in vain. Though before I had been under frequent convictions, and was drove to a form of religion, yet I knew nothing as I ought to know. But then I was brought to the footstool of sovereign grace; saw myself polluted by nature and practice; had affecting views of the Divine wrath I deserved; was made to despair of help in myself, and almost concluded that my day of grace was past. These convictions held for some months; greater at some seasons than at others; but I never revealed them to any, which I have much lamented since. It pleased God, at length, to reveal his Son to me in the Gospel, an all-sufficient and willing Saviour, and I hope inclined me to receive Him on the terms of the Gospel. I received some consolation, and found a great change in myself. Before this, I was strongly attached to the Arminian scheme, but then was made to see those things in a different light, and seemingly felt the truth of the Calvinian doctrines."

This change in his religious views and feelings was quickly succeeded by a determination to devote his life to the Christian ministry. And, having gone through the requisite preparation, he received license to preach in September, 1736. He preached his first sermon at Greenfield, Mass., and then went to New Jersey and laboured a short time at Hanover. His uncommon powers in the pulpit attracted no small attention, and the church at Newark, then in a somewhat depressed state, invited him to officiate as a stated supply for one year, commencing with January, 1736–37. At the expiration of that term,—January 25, 1737–38,—he was ordained and installed pastor of the church,—Mr. Pierson preaching the Sermon, and Jonathan Dickinson giving the Charge.

* Smith's Sermon occasioned by his death.—Livingston's Eulogy.—Miller's Ret., II.—App. to Green's Disc.—App. to Dwight's Life of Edwards.—Memoir of Aaron Burr.—Stearns' Hist. First Church in Newark.

In August, 1739, about a year and a half after his ministry commenced, a remarkable revival of religion began in his congregation, which increased gradually from month to month, until it pervaded all ages and all classes of society. In the winter of 1840-41, was another similar season, in respect to which, says an eye witness, "there is good reason to conclude that there were a greater number now brought home to Christ than in the former gracious visitation."

In June, 1742, the First Church in New Haven—in consequence, it is said, of some difficulties, which it was thought might best be terminated by the settlement of a colleague,—presented a call to Mr. Burr to become associated with their pastor, the Rev. Mr. Noyes; and, in pursuance of this call, a committee was appointed, with President Clap at its head, to go to Newark, and lay the call before Mr. Burr, and prosecute it before the Presbytery to which he belonged, with directions likewise "to treat with the good people of Newark, and obtain their consent to Mr. Burr's removal to New Haven." Of the result of this application nothing more is known than that it was unsuccessful.

Mr. Burr entered warmly into the great revival that took place in the early part of his ministry, and was in intimate relations with Whitefield, the Tennents, and many of the principal promoters of the work, though he was by no means insensible to the incidental evils by which it was marred. In a letter to Dr. Bellamy, dated June 28, 1742, he says,—

"I have so many things lying on my mind, that I know not how to communicate them with pen and ink. I long to have you alone a few hours, that I might unbosom myself freely; but 'tis good to have no will of our own. 'Tis glad tidings of great joy we hear from Southberry. But some things that I have heard from there I don't see through, which, in some measure, damps my joy. The bearer has given me more satisfaction. Glory be to God that he carries on his work in any way; I do rejoice and will rejoice. However, there are some things that persons are apt to run into at the present day, that we ought not to encourage:—1. Their being led by impressions and impulses made on their minds, with or without a text of Scripture, and taking their own passions and imaginations for the operations of God's Spirit. 2. Giving heed to visions, trances, and revelations. 3. Speaking of Divine things with an air of levity, vanity, laughter, &c. 4. Declaring their judgment about others openly and freely in their absence, whether they are converted or not. 5. Making their own feelings a rule to judge others by. 6. For laymen to take upon them to exhort in a public assembly. 7. Separating from their minister under a notion of his being unconverted."

The Rev. Jonathan Dickinson, first President of the College of New Jersey, having died at Elizabethtown in the autumn of 1747, the students whose education he had been conducting, were removed to Newark, and placed under the care of Mr. Burr, who had previously been in the habit of instructing in the classic languages, and had had under his direction a large Latin School. Whether he was formally appointed President under the first charter of the College, is a matter of doubt; but it seems he had charge of the youth who had been collected as the beginning of a College, for about a year before the charter was obtained, under which they were graduated. He was appointed President under the new charter on the 9th of November, 1748; and, on the same day, conferred the Bachelor's degree upon a class who were prepared to receive it. On that day also he delivered his Inaugural, which is spoken of in the record of the Corporation, as "a handsome and elegant Latin Oration." Either the original manuscript, or a copy in the handwriting of the author, is still in existence.

In 1754, Whitefield, who was then paying a visit to Governor Belcher, at Elizabethtown, attended the Commencement at Newark, on which occa-

sion President Burr had the pleasure of conferring upon him the degree of Master of Arts. Immediately after the Commencement, Mr. Burr accompanied Whitefield to Boston, having a high esteem for his character, and a deep interest in the success of his labours.

Mr. Burr's devotion to the College was most constant and exemplary. He served it not only as the principal instructor and presiding officer, but in soliciting donations for the purchase of a library and philosophical apparatus, and for erecting a building for the accommodation of the students. In this agency, which he undertook by request of the Trustees, he was remarkably successful. He discharged the duties of both President of the College, and Pastor of the Church, until the autumn of 1755, when his pastoral relation was dissolved, and he gave his whole time to the service of the College.

The village of Princeton having been fixed upon as the most convenient situation for the College, the new edifice was erected there, under the superintendence of Mr. Burr. In the Autumn of 1756,—the building being so far completed as to be ready for the reception of the students, they removed thither, about seventy in number, and commenced the occupancy of it.

But Mr. Burr's life was now rapidly approaching its close. In the latter part of July, or the beginning of August, 1757, he made a hasty visit to Stockbridge, and, on his return to Princeton, went immediately to Elizabethtown, where he made an attempt before the Legislature to procure the legal exemption of the students from military duty. Thence he went to Newark, and preached an extemporaneous Funeral Sermon. He then returned to Princeton, and proceeded immediately to Philadelphia on the business of the College, and on his way contracted an intermittent fever. On his return, he received the news of the death of his friend Governor Beleher, at Elizabethtown, and was informed that he was designated to preach at his funeral. Having devoted the afternoon of September 2d to preparation for this service in the midst of a high fever, he rode the next day to Elizabethtown; and, on the day succeeding that, in a state of extreme exhaustion, preached the sermon. He returned to Princeton on the 5th, and his disease, from that time, made constant progress, until the 24th, when it terminated in death. His mind was entirely composed in the prospect of his departure, and he died rejoicing in the consolations of the Gospel. A Eulogy was pronounced upon him by Governor (William) Livingston, and a Funeral Sermon was preached by the Rev. Caleb Smith, of Newark Mountains, by appointment of the Trustees, and printed at their expense.

During the first fifteen years of his ministry, Mr. Burr remained unmarried. On the 29th of June, 1752, he was united in marriage with Esther, daughter of the Rev. Jonathan Edwards,—she being, at that time, only nineteen years of age. She was distinguished for an attractive exterior, for a richly endowed and highly cultivated mind, and for earnest and consistent piety. It was a somewhat novel circumstance that, after the preliminaries of the marriage had been settled, the bride was sent for with her mother to come to Newark, and the wedding took place there, amidst the congratulations of the people among whom she was to live. She survived her husband less than a year, and died on the 7th of April, 1758, in the twenty-seventh year of her age. They left two children—a daughter and a son—both born during their residence in Newark. The former was married to the Hon.

Tapping Reeve, Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of Connecticut; and the latter, bearing his father's name, and inheriting his talents, and rising to great political distinction, nevertheless had a history more sad and monitory than almost any other man of the age.

Mr. Burr published a Latin Grammar; a pamphlet entitled "The Supreme Deity of our Lord Jesus Christ maintained in a Letter to the dedicator of Mr. Emlyn's Inquiry into the Scripture account of Jesus Christ,"—reprinted in Boston, 1791; a Fast Sermon on account of the encroachments of the French, 1755; a Sermon preached before the Synod of New York, 1756; and a Sermon on the death of Governor Belcher, 1757.

The character of President Burr is thus sketched in the Funeral Sermon by the Rev. Mr. Smith:—

"It may not be improper here to take a more distinct view of his character as a divine, and his qualifications as a preacher. He was certainly an adept in Divinity, a scribe well instructed unto the Kingdom of Heaven, who out of his plentiful treasure could bring forth things new and old. In the Scriptures of truth he was thoroughly versed; read them by turns with the eye of a critic, to search out their sense, and in a devotional way, to obtain their salutary influence on his own heart. The Oracles of God were the standard of his Divinity, his ultimate Confession of Faith, the measure of his practice, and the man of his counsel, in all the parts of his ministry. He was greatly a master of systematical, casuistical and practical Divinity; understood polemical, but cared not much to wield the sword of religious controversy. His inclination led him to a field which wore a milder face, and where there is less danger of hurting that faith which is our own, and losing a good conscience ourselves, while we are attempting to rectify the faith and mend the consciences of others.

"In the pulpit, he verily shone like a star of the first magnitude, and appeared a wise master-builder in the house of God. He dwelt upon things of the highest moment, and cautiously built, not with wood, hay and stubble, but with gold silver and precious stones. His public discourses were calculated to convey light to the mind, warmth to the affections, and health to the heart. His subjects, being well chosen, were handled with judgment and solidity; for he had, to an eminent degree, a masterly skill in dividing the word of truth, and gave with wisdom and faithfulness a portion to each in their season.

"When leisure would permit, his sermons were usually penned at large; yet if duty called, and he was not otherwise provided, he would cheerfully enter the pulpit without his notes. And indeed so very extraordinary was his talent for extemporary preaching, that the most competent judges approved his conduct, and heard him with pleasure and profit. A rich fund of Divine knowledge, command of his thoughts, surpassing quickness of invention, and remarkable readiness of expression, together with a heart commonly warm in the cause of God, and engaged by desires of doing good to the souls of men, rendered him truly a master-piece in performances of this kind.

"He never ascended the desk, but those who knew him had raised expectations, which were rarely, if ever, disappointed, and often exceeded. His gesture in the pulpit was easy and natural, and there was an air of mild gravity and genuine benignity in his aspect, that tended greatly to engage the favourable regard of his hearers. He was blessed with an easy door of utterance, and his deliverance was graceful and harmonious. * * * His diction was expressive, and his style neat and flowing; his language was well suited to the language of a Christian orator. When he thought proper, and occasion required, it was either plain or polished; for he could speak freely with such simplicity as a child might understand, or with elegance that would please the politest ear.

"In the gift of prayer he much excelled; for a spirit of prayer and supplication seemed always to rest upon him; and there appeared such marks of unfeigned sincerity, suitable affection and fervency, added to a rich variety and exact pertinency of expression, on all occasions, in his performance of this duty, that few, if any, were more fit to lead in public acts of devotion, or be the mouth of others to God. It may also be observed here that, in all the exercises of religion, both in public and in the family, he carefully avoided a tiresome prolixity, and was rather short and animated.

"If we now turn and survey the figure which this worthy man made in another great employment,—I mean as President of this School of the Prophets, we shall find no less cause to admire his character, revere his memory, and lament his death.

"When he entered upon this station, though he had then a large stock of learning of the scholastic kind, having been before, for a number of years, a constant instructor of youth in the learned languages and liberal arts; nevertheless he applied himself more closely to those branches of literature, which he judged a man ought to be accurately acquainted with, in order to discharge the trust faithfully, or appear with repu-

tation and a requisite dignity as a head teacher in such a public school. He also viewed it, not as a part of ease, but of weighty business, and accordingly filled it with application and unwearied industry, much to the benefit of the students, satisfaction of the Trustees, credit of the College, and his own honour.

“The abundant store of useful knowledge with which he had been carefully enriching himself from his youth up, and to which he was continually making large additions, was here improved to the most valuable purpose. His mind was well replenished with ideas; and these he had an inimitable faculty of communicating with clearness and ease. His aptness to teach was almost without parallel. He laboured exceedingly that the youth committed to his tuition and care might be sent abroad with such a foundation of knowledge, as might be honorary to the place of their education, and fit them for future service in Church or State; and it was a real grief to him, when these his painful endeavours failed of their desired success, which it can hardly be supposed but they too often did.

“As the piety of President Burr was as conspicuous as his erudition, he took indefatigable pains to cultivate the hearts of his pupils as well as their heads; and equally concerned himself to dismiss them as good Christians and good scholars. They who have had the happiness of being educated under his inspection, can bear witness with what zeal, solicitude, and parental affection he has often pressed upon them the care of their souls, and in the most moving manner, even with melting tenderness, urged the importance of their becoming true disciples of a holy Jesus. A gracious God was mercifully pleased, as we trust, to grant success, in some instances, to these pious attempts: for he had good hope concerning a number that they were really initiated into the school of Christ. The winter season of the last year of his life was his most joyful harvest, when a very remarkable Divine influence appeared among the students in this house; the good impressions that were then made, we have grounds to believe, are yet abiding with many.

“In matters of government in the College, he discovered great wisdom and sagacity. In judgment and natural temper he was inclined to soft and moderate measures; but, where these failed of their desired efficacy, he gave way to a requisite severity. * * * As to his manner of presiding at the public Commencements, I imagine none who were fit judges, but will readily acknowledge that, in moderating the disputes and all the other exercises, which, on those days, belonged to his office, he acquitted himself with high honour and deserved applause. * * * * *

“In ecclesiastical judicatures and councils, his assistance was often desired, and his judgment deservedly esteemed. He was cool and dispassionate in all debates, and had the felicity in general to have his sentiments embraced, or at least his measures come into; for there seldom an occasion presented, but he either overcame those who were of an opposite opinion by the force of his reasoning, or won them by such engaging persuasions as few were able to resist.

“He was a great friend to liberty, both civil and religious, and generously espoused this noble cause on every suitable occasion. As he abhorred tyranny in the State, so he detested persecution in the Church, and all those anti-christian methods which have been used by most prevailing parties, somehow or other, to enslave the consciences of their dissenting brethren. He was very far from indulging a party spirit, and hated bigotry in all its odious shapes. His arms were open to a good man of any denomination, however he might in principle differ or in practice disagree, as to what he himself, in the lesser matters of religion, judged to be preferable. He was no man for contention, and at a wide remove from a wrangling disputant; these bitter ingredients came not into the composition of his amiable character. His moderation was well known to all men that knew any thing of him. A sweetness of temper, obliging courtesy, and mildness of behaviour, added to an engaging candour of sentiment, spread a glory over his reputation, endeared his person to all his acquaintance, recommended his ministry and whole profession to mankind in general, and greatly contributed to his extensive usefulness.”