

A

HISTORY

OF THE

Presbyterian Church in America,

FROM ITS ORIGIN UNTIL THE YEAR 1760.

WITH

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCHES OF ITS EARLY MINISTERS.

BY THE

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WITH

A Memoir of the Author,

BY THE REV. C. VAN RENSSELAER, D.D.

AND

An Historical Introduction,

BY THE REV. WILLIAM BLACKWOOD, D.D.

PUBLISHED BY AUTHORITY OF THE PRESBYTERIAN HISTORICAL SOCIETY.

PHILADELPHIA:

JOSEPH M. WILSON,

No. 27 SOUTH TENTH STREET, BELOW CHESTNUT ST.

1857.

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a meeting-house thirty feet square, and, after passing through many uncomfortable seasons, obtained a pastor who served them faithfully through a long life.

In 1715, Andrews wrote pressingly to the people of Woodbridge, urging them to use utmost diligence to have a minister ordained among them. At that time, Pierson was preaching there, and a call was offered to him the next year. He was ordained there, April 29, 1717, before a very great assembly. Andrews, Morgan, and Orr were assisted on the occasion by the venerable Prudden, of Newark, and Dickinson, of Elizabethtown.

He is said* to have employed no elders in the management of church affairs; but this tradition is inconsistent with the record, his elder at synod, in 1742, being John Ball; probably, also, Moses Rolph attended in several previous years.

He published a treatise on the "Intercession of Christ," and a sermon preached before the Presbytery of New York, May 8, 1751, on "Christ, the son of God, as God, Man, Mediator."

His wife, Ruth, daughter of the Rev. Timothy Woodbridge, of Hartford, died in 1732, aged thirty-eight. Dickinson printed his sermon at her funeral.

In 1753, he resigned his pastoral charge and settled at Mendham, New Jersey, and was the minister there for ten years. He then removed to Long Island, and resided on the farm of his second wife, Judith Smith. On her decease, he removed to Hanover, New Jersey, and closed his days under the roof of his son-in-law, the Rev. Jacob Green. He died August 23, 1770, aged eighty-one.

JONATHAN DICKINSON

WAS the grandson of Nathaniel Dickinson, one of the first settlers of Wethersfield, Connecticut, who, with his minister, Mr. Russell, and "the aggrieved brethren in Hartford," purchased and settled Hadley and the adjoining towns in 1659. His estate was rated, on his removal, at two hundred pounds,—one of the largest in the town. His son Hezekiah lived in Hatfield, where Jonathan was born, April 22, 1688. He graduated at Yale, in 1706. His father dying soon after, his mother married Thomas Ingersoll, of Springfield.

He came to Elizabethtown in 1708, and soon after married Jo-

* Dr. Azel Roe's MS. History of Woodbridge: quoted by Dr. Hodge.

anna, the daughter of the Rev. Samuel Melyen, or of some other descendant of Joseph Melyen, one of the associates in the purchase of the Elizabethtown Tract under Governor Nicolls's grant. His entry in the family Bible of the birth of his first child is, "Our son Melyen was born December 7, 1709."

He was ordained by the ministers of Fairfield county, Connecticut, September 29, 1709. Morgan, of Freehold, preached from Mark xvi. 16. His field of labour embraced Rahway, Westfield, Connecticut Farms, Springfield, and part of Chatham. He was engaged in teaching, and in the practice of medicine.

He met with Philadelphia Presbytery as a correspondent, in 1715, at the ordination of Orr, and became a member early in 1717.

His first publication was his sermon preached before the synod in 1722, on 1 Timothy iii. 17,—the expression of his views on the subject of Synodical Acts, or Church Legislative Power.

He entered warmly on the Episcopal controversy when a heartless Arminianism and a hope of court favour led a few ministers in Connecticut to conform. In 1724, he published his "Defence of Presbyterian Ordination in Boston." A reply from a Churchman drew from him an answer, in which he says, "High-Churchism is properly no more a part of the Church of England than a wen is of the human body."

He published "Remarks on Thomson's Overture, introducing the Adopting Act," in April, 1729; the "Reasonableness of Christianity," in 1732; the "Vanity of Human Institutions in Religious Worship," a sermon he had preached at Newark, June 2, 1732, on the introduction of the Episcopal services into that town; the "Reasonableness of Nonconformity," in 1738; the "Witness of the Spirit," in 1740; "A Treatise on Regeneration," in 1744; the "Vindication of the Sovereignty of Grace," in 1776; and "Familiar Letters to a Gentleman," and a "Dialogue, entitled a Display of Saving Grace." Mr. Wetmore defended against him the doctrine of regeneration by baptism; the Rev. Andrew Crosswell condemned the "Dialogue on a Display of Grace" as pernicious beyond parallel. Dickinson replied to him, and also to the Rev. John Beach, who wrote against his book on "Sovereign Grace." Beach rejoined, and Dickinson left, at his death, an answer unfinished. It was completed and published by his brother.

The Rev. Dr. Johnson, of Stratford, Connecticut, controverted his opinions, under the name of Aristocles. The Rev. Experience Mayhew also addressed two letters to him. To both of them he replied.

In 1740, he, with Burr and Pemberton, communicated to the Society in Scotland for Propagating the Gospel, the deplorable and perishing condition of the Indians on Long Island, in New Jersey, and Pennsylvania. They were appointed correspondents, and authorized to employ missionaries. They engaged Azariah Horton and David Brainerd, and were forward to countenance them in their work and to rejoice their spirits with hearty counsel.

His former instances of joy in revivals, previously enjoyed, were more eminent and remarkable than any of a late date. While he preached to youth, there was weeping, audible sighing, and sobbing. About sixty were added to the communion; they were under a law-work for a considerable time; pungent and thorough conviction emptied them of self-righteousness, and drew them to Christ.

The disorders attending the awakening in New Jersey grew out of erroneous views of assurance and the witness of the Spirit. Antinomianism appeared, and denounced the practice of looking for evidence of justification in the progress of our sanctification. There was much arrogance in some who were called converts; and many upheld a preacher who had been suspended for dreadful scandals. These things called forth his "Dialogue on the Display of Grace" and his sermon on the "Witness of the Spirit."

His wife died April 20, 1745, aged sixty-three; she was the mother of a large family, of whom only three daughters survived her. The third child was named after his father, born Sept. 19, 1713, graduated at Yale in 1731, and took the Master's degree. He left his home; and his father daily in the family entreated God for him. At length he ceased to do so. His household noticed, but none asked the reason, supposing that he had received privately intelligence of his end too painful to be uttered. His youngest daughter, Martha, married the Rev. Caleb Smith; another was the second wife of Mr. Jonathan Sergeant, of Princeton, the grandfather of the Hon. John Sergeant, of Philadelphia; a third married Mr. John Cooper, probably of West Hampton, Long Island.

Brainerd spent part of the closing year of his life under Dickinson's roof, and solemnized his second marriage at Newark, April 7, 1747. He rode back to Elizabethtown in the evening, "in a pleasant frame, full of composure and sweetness."

Dickinson died Oct. 12, 1747, of a pleuritic attack, in his sixtieth year. Pierson preached at his funeral. The New York Postboy contains a high eulogium on him.

Dr. Johnes,* of Morristown, who was with him in his last illness, asked him, just before his death, concerning his prospects. "Many days have passed between God and my soul, in which I have solemnly dedicated myself to him; and, I trust, what I have committed unto him, He is able to keep until that day." These were his last words.

It is said that tidings† of Dickinson's decease came to Mr. Vaughan, the minister of Elizabethtown, then lying on his death-bed, when he exclaimed, "Oh that I had hold of the skirts of Brother Jonathan!" They entered on their ministry in the town about the same time, and "in their death they were not divided."

* Austin's Preface to the Five Points.

† Dr. Murray's Notes on Elizabethtown.

Forty-six* years after his departure, "there were those who testified that he was a most solemn, weighty, and moving preacher; a uniform advocate for the distinguishing doctrines of grace; industrious, indefatigable, and successful in his ministerial labours. His person was manly and of full size, his aspect grave and solemn, so that the wicked seemed to tremble in his presence."

Bellamy speaks of him as "the great Mr. Dickinson." Dr. Erskine said the British Isles had produced no such writers on divinity in the eighteenth century as Dickinson and Edwards; he wished Hervey had seen their treatises before he prepared his works. Dr. Rodgers was often heard to say that he was one of the most venerable and apostolical-looking men he ever saw.

Foxcroft, of Boston, was his friend through life, and, in his preface to his posthumous piece, expresses a high sense of his excellence. His works were collected after his death and published in Boston. A selection, comprising all that were not local in their design, was printed in Edinburgh, in an octavo volume, in 1793.

His treatise on "The True Scripture Doctrine concerning the Five Points of Election, Original Sin, Grace in Conversion, Justification by Faith," was issued at Boston, in 1741. Under the direction of New York Presbytery, in 1796, a new edition appeared; and another was undertaken at Chambersburg in 1800.†

SAMUEL GELSTON

WAS born in the North of Ireland in 1692, and came as a probationer to New England in 1715. He was received in the fall under the care of Philadelphia Presbytery, and was sent to the people of Kent, on Delaware. Though desired to stay, he left without the consent of presbytery, and went to Southampton, on Long Island. There his brother Hugh resided: he was called as colleague with the pastor. Samuel Whiting and the congregation placed itself under the presbytery's care. The Presbytery of Long Island, on its organization, took him on trial, and ordained and installed him, April 17, 1717. His stay was about ten years; and, Aug. 27, 1728, he was received as a member of Newcastle Presbytery, and took into consideration a call to Newcastle. The next

* The Rev. David Austin, in his Preface to the Five Points.

† John Colman, of Chambersburg, subscribed for 144 copies.