

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.

BY WILLIAM B. SPRAGUE, D. D.

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VOLUME III.

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## DAVID RICE.\*

1762—1816.

DAVID RICE was born in Hanover County, Va., December 20, 1733. His grandfather, Thomas Rice, who was an Englishman, but of Welsh extraction, migrated to Virginia at an early period. Having had a considerable estate left to him in England, he crossed the ocean with a view to receive it, but never returned; and it was supposed that he was assassinated on board the ship on which he took passage. He left in Virginia a widow with a large family of children, one of whom, *David*, was the father of the subject of this notice. He was a plain farmer, and both he and his wife were members of the Established Church. They would never hold slaves; he, because he considered it unprofitable; she, because she considered it morally wrong.

Their son, *David*, had religious impressions from a very early period, which never left him until he was hopefully the subject of a genuine conversion. He lived in a congregation which was under the pastoral care of the Rev. John Todd, and was occasionally, especially at Communion seasons, served by that eminent man, the Rev. Samuel Davies; and it was by the ministrations of the latter particularly, that he believed himself to have been savingly benefitted. He began his classical studies under Mr. Todd, and continued them under the Rev. James Waddel, D. D. "It seems probable, however," says the Rev. Dr. Archibald Alexander, who had the best means of forming a judgment on the subject, "that James Waddel was the teacher of the school kept at Mr. Todd's; and that the facts are that Mr. Rice began his studies before Mr. Waddel arrived, and completed his preparatory course under this teacher at the house of the Rev. John Todd; for it is believed that Mr. Waddel never taught a school any where else in Virginia, until long after Mr. Rice was graduated and licensed."

Mr. Davies having been appointed President of New Jersey College, Mr. Rice accompanied him thither in 1759, and became a member of the Junior class. Having taken the degree of Bachelor of Arts in 1761, he returned to Virginia, and studied Theology under the Rev. John Todd, and was licensed to preach by the Presbytery of Hanover, in November, 1762.

The first field of his evangelical labours was in the Southern part of Virginia and the Northern part of North Carolina. After labouring here, not without some evidence of success, for about six months, he visited Pennsylvania, where, agreeably to a previous engagement, he married Mary, daughter of the Rev. Samuel Blair. Thence he returned to Virginia, with the purpose of settling in North Carolina; but stopping at Hanover, then vacant by the removal of Mr. Davies, he received a call to settle there, and, having accepted it, was ordained and installed in December, 1763, at the age of thirty.

Here he laboured four or five years with considerable success, though his own impression was that his ministry accomplished more for the blacks than the whites. But an old dispute between two of the principal elders, which

\* Memoir by Dr. Bishop.—Foote's Sketches, of Va. II.—Davidson's Hist. Presb. Ch. Ky.—MSS. from his relatives and Rev. Dr. Archibald Alexander.

originated in the time of Mr. Davies, having been revived,—in consequence of which the congregation were likely to be embarrassed in respect to his support, he obtained from the Presbytery a dissolution of his pastoral relation. He hated contention, was subject to depression of spirits, and was often fearful of the worst; and this probably had much to do with his determination to seek another field of labour. The separation from his charge was a painful event both to him and to them; for they were mutually and warmly attached.

After giving up his charge, Mr. Rice remained, for two or three years, unsettled, though he was, during this period, employed in his Master's work, as opportunity offered. At length he determined to fix himself in Bedford County, Va.,—a new and frontier settlement, in a mountainous region, with a population drawn from various parts of the world, and representing nearly all religious denominations. Here he took charge of three congregations; one of which was five, another eleven, and another twenty-five, miles from his dwelling. The last mentioned was called "the Peaks," as being near the Peaks of Otter. Here his labours were greatly blessed: without any extraordinary excitement, there was a lively and healthful state of religious feeling, and an earnest attention to the preaching of the word, which lasted, without any perceptible decline, for ten years. All classes and denominations were fond of attending his ministry. In due time, this congregation became sufficiently numerous to require all his labours, and, accordingly, he gave up the others and confined his attention to this. His ministry here was during the war of the Revolution, when many other congregations were scattered and separated from their pastors. It was much to the praise of the people that, during this disastrous period, they fulfilled their pecuniary engagements to him with punctuality.

When Kentucky was opened for settlement, Mr. Rice paid an early visit to that country, thinking it possible, as he had a rising family, that it might be his duty to remove thither, with reference to the more advantageous settlement of his children. His impression at first was adverse to a removal, and he returned to Virginia, resolved not to attempt it. In consequence, however, of some change of circumstances, particularly of his receiving a request, signed by some three hundred persons, to come and take charge of a religious Society in that region, he changed his purpose, and determined to cast in his lot with the new settlers of the West. He, accordingly, migrated thither in October, 1783.

The difficulties which he had to encounter, as a minister of the Gospel in this new country, were many and formidable. He took no special charge the first year; but, at the commencement of the second, a congregation was organized in what is now called Mercer County, with as much formality as circumstances would admit. They had three places of worship, which were known by the names of Danville, Cane-Run, and the Forks of Dick's River.

In this extensive field Mr. Rice laboured steadily and assiduously for fifteen years. He was now sixty-five years of age, and was troubled with an affection of the head, which incapacitated him for close and continuous thought, and subjected him to an almost habitual melancholy. He was also not a little tried by pecuniary embarrassments. He had purchased land, on the faith of his congregation guaranteeing the payment, which, however, was so long deferred, if not entirely forgotten, that the good man and his

family would have been actually reduced to want, had it not been for the seasonable and kindly interposition of a benevolent individual in the neighbourhood.

Under these circumstances, in 1798, he removed to Green County, then a new settlement in the Southern part of Kentucky. He did not, however, take a pastoral charge, or attend much on Church courts, though he preached frequently, in the way of assisting his brethren, and of supplying vacant congregations. In 1805 and 1806, he performed an extensive missionary tour through Kentucky and Ohio, by appointment of the General Assembly, with a view to ascertain particularly the religious condition of the country. After his return, he addressed an Epistle to the Presbyterians of Kentucky, published the same year, and afterwards, in 1808, a Second Epistle, warning them with great fidelity and solemnity against what he believed to be the prevailing errors of the times.

During the last three years of his life, he was prevented from preaching and writing almost entirely. He had no complaints except what arose from the regular decay of nature, till the beginning of the year 1815, when he had a slight apoplectic stroke, from the effects of which he never recovered. On the day that completed his eightieth year, he preached, at his own house, his last sermon on Psalm xc. 12: "So teach us to number our days that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom." After this, he made no more appointments, except on the occasion of hearing of the death of his son, Dr. David Rice of Virginia, when he made a solemn address to his neighbours assembled at his dwelling. About the first of February preceding his death, he was seized with a difficulty of breathing, which he received as an admonition that his end was near. Early in the succeeding May, he was attacked with something like influenza, accompanied with fever and pain; and from this time till the close of his life, he had scarcely a momentary respite from bodily suffering. But he had the utmost tranquillity of mind, in the prospect of his departure, and his last expressions indicated an impatience to be absent from the body, that he might be present with the Lord. He died on the 18th of June, 1816, in the eighty-third year of his age. His excellent wife died a few years before him. They had eleven children,—six sons and five daughters. One of the daughters was married to the Rev. James Mitchel, and still (1857) survives, at the advanced age of more than ninety.

Mr. Rice was always the friend of liberal learning, and in more instances than one exerted himself in founding Seminaries. While in Virginia, he took an active part in the establishment of Hampden Sidney College, and had an important agency in obtaining the first two Presidents,—the Rev. Samuel Stanhope Smith, and the Rev. John Blair Smith. He was one of the first Trustees of the Transylvania University, and President of the Board from 1783 to 1787. The first Grammar School in Kentucky was opened in his house, in Lincoln County, in November, 1784.

The following is a list of Mr. Rice's publications:—

An Essay on Baptism, 1789. [This was probably the first pamphlet originating in Kentucky. It was printed in Baltimore.] A Lecture on Divine Decrees, 1791. Slavery inconsistent with justice and policy, 1792. A Sermon at the opening of the Synod of Kentucky, 1803. An Epistle to the Citizens of Kentucky, professing Christianity, especially those that are or have been denominated Presbyterians, 1805. A second Epistle, &c.,

1808. Letters on the Evidences, Nature, and Effects, of Christianity—composed for the use of his sons in 1812, in the seventy-ninth year of his age, and published in the Weekly Recorder for 1814.

FROM THE REV. THOMAS CLELAND, D. D.

SALVISA, Ky., March 20, 1852.

Dear Sir: I regret that my advanced age does not allow me to do all that I could wish in answer to your request; for, as David says,—“My strength fail-eth,” both intellectual and physical; and yet I cannot refuse to give you, in the most general manner, my impressions concerning the venerable man in respect to whom you inquire. I had once a pretty good opportunity of knowing him, however little ability I now have of communicating the result of my observations.

Father Rice (for this is the appellation by which he is generally known) could hardly be considered as possessing talents of a very commanding order, though they were certainly highly respectable, and eminently adapted to usefulness. His distinguishing characteristic was sound judgment, and his disposition was conservative. He was remarkable for both the spirit and the habit of devotion. You could not be long in his company, without being deeply impressed with the idea that his affections had a strong tendency toward Heaven. In his general intercourse with society he was dignified and grave,—perhaps above most ministers of his day; insomuch that young people generally felt little freedom in his presence; but it was a characteristic of that period that ministers usually carried themselves with more reserve, and were less accessible to all classes, and on all occasions, than they are now. He did, however, occasionally, unbend in familiar intercourse, and would, now and then, enliven conversation with an agreeable anecdote. He was a deeply earnest and effective preacher, delivering solemn and impressive thoughts in a solemn and impressive manner; and yet the effect of his manner was somewhat diminished by his occasionally taking on a sympathetic tone, which, to many of his hearers, seemed like a departure from the simplicity of nature. He had great executive powers, and he exerted them, in various ways, for the general improvement of the community in which he lived. He was not only eminently faithful in his stated ministrations, but acted the part of a father to the infant churches of Kentucky, besides devoting some share of his attention to literature and even politics.

Mr. Rice was tall and slender in person, quiet in his movements, and even at the age of seventy, he exhibited a remarkable degree of alertness. At that advanced period, I may safely say that no minister in Kentucky filled a wider space than he did. He was not like the eccentric comet, with its long fiery tail, which attracts the gaze and awakens the speculations of beholders for a few days and then disappears, but as the glorious sun, which, by its regular and constant influences, enriches our fields, illumines our horizon, and gladdens our hearts.

Affectionately yours,

THOMAS CLELAND.