

A

HISTORY

OF THE

Presbyterian Church in America,

FROM ITS ORIGIN UNTIL THE YEAR 1760.

WITH

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCHES OF ITS EARLY MINISTERS.

BY THE

REV. RICHARD WEBSTER,

LATE PASTOR OF THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, MAUCH CHUNK, PA.

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.

Entered according to Act of Congress, in the year 1857, by
JOSEPH M. WILSON,
in the Clerk's Office of the District Court of the United States for the Eastern District of
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gave prudential and moral reasons for desiring his removal, and were directed to present them in writing. The elders declined to prosecute, but stated generally the circumstances. He said he would resign if fourteen persons desired it: there being thirty-seven present, they were asked; eighteen desired that he should go, and nine that he should stay. Further inquiry showed that there were two to one against him. The pastoral relation was dissolved: the use of the parsonage till April was allowed him, but not any winter wood, nor might he sow any winter grain. He appealed to the synod, in 1776: the act separating the pastoral tie was confirmed, but they regretted that the matters relating to the glebe had not been left to arbitrators mutually chosen. Bay in a solemn manner declared that he declined the jurisdiction of the synod, and would not have any further connection with it. He is said, by Riker, in his "History of Newtown," to have died soon after.

His wife was the daughter of Elihu Hall, of Nottingham, Maryland; his son, Elihu Hall Bay, was an eminent jurist, and Chief-Justice of South Carolina.

JOHN GRANT

GRADUATED at Yale in 1741, and was ordained, by New York Presbytery, pastor of Westfield, New Jersey, before October, 1746. He died, September 16, 1753, aged thirty-seven.

JOHN RODGERS

WAS born in Boston, August 5, 1727. His parents came from the city of Londonderry in 1721, and removed, in 1728, to Philadelphia.

During the first visit of Whitefield to Philadelphia, in 1739, while preaching at night on the court-house steps, he pressed near, and held a lantern for his accommodation. Absorbed and deeply interested, he became so much agitated as to be scarcely able to stand; the lantern fell from his hand, and was dashed to pieces. When little more than twelve years old, he became hopefully pious.

Resolving to enter into the ministry, he began to study the learned languages, and, in 1743, was placed under Samuel Blair, at Fagg's Manor. He was a favourite pupil, and "profited beyond many of his equals;" for Davies says of Blair,—

"Rodgers, whom he as his own soul refined."

Gilbert Tennent was his instructor in theology. He put himself under the care of Newcastle Presbytery in June, 1747, and was licensed October 14. The winter was employed in supplying the numerous vacancies earnestly supplicating at each session of presbytery. In the spring, at the urgent solicitation of Davies, he went with him to Virginia. Governor Gooch repeatedly directed the clerk of the Council to take the testimonials which Rodgers presented, that they might be read, and that he might be licensed under the Toleration Act. The General Court insisted that no step should be taken till they should sit in council. At the suggestion of the governor, after the Council had refused, they memorialized the court; but in vain, for Rodgers was forbidden "to preach within the colony, under a penalty of a fine of five hundred pounds, and a year's imprisonment without bail or main-prize." He regretted afterwards that he had not appealed to the king in council, and have secured redress in his own case, and preserved others from being hampered in their missions by illegal and vexatious treatment. Doddridge thought that a favourable decision might have been obtained and been extensively useful.

He spent the summer of 1748 in Somerset county, Maryland, where the revival—began, in 1745, under Robinson's labours—had been more powerful than anywhere else in the colony. There Davies had spent the preceding winter. Rodgers was successful in winning souls; among others, William Winder, Esq., of Wicomico, a gentleman of wealth, worth, and high standing. He gave up his Arminian notions and his Episcopal predilections, and became a distinguished, exemplary, and useful member of our church and a valuable ruling elder.*

The home of Rodgers was at Captain Venable's, on the Head of Wicomico: it was the home of Makemie. Captain Joseph Venable sat on the bench when Somerset Court licensed McNish and Hampton to preach; and the meeting-house on Wicomico was on Venable's land.

The summer on the Eastern Shore was one of the most pleasant and useful of his life. In a very uncommon degree his labours

* One of his sons was Governor of Maryland. His daughter Leah married J. R. Morris, of Worcester county; and, being left a widow in 1795, she removed to the house of her son, Dr. W. W. Morris, at Dover, Delaware. Dr. Morris has been for many years a ruling elder and zealous supporter of the church.

were blessed: the triumphs of the gospel were numerous and signal, and, in several cases, remarkable.

X In the fall, the churches of Monokin and Wicomico called him, as also did Pequea, Conecocheague, and St. George's. The last was the feeblest; but the presbytery urged him to accept it, and he did so at once.

There Robinson had spent his closing days. Davies was the first choice of the people, and he would gladly have settled there; but he was constrained to go Virginia. Rodgers was ordained at St. George's, March 16, 1749. Finley preached, and Blair presided.

+ The revival begun in Whitefield's early visits increased under Robinson, and still more under Rodgers. The congregation rapidly enlarged; a new house of worship was erected, and was soon too strait for them. When an addition was built, often the aisles, the doors, and the windows, were filled with attentive and weeping hearers. Drawyers and Pencader could scarcely support a minister, so many chose to go to St. George's and the Forest.

Near St. George's, an Episcopal church had been built early in the century. The services were conducted in the Welsh language; and the Venerable Society sustained for many years missionaries at North and South Appoquinimy, or, "apud Quinquionem et Appoquinionem." The congregation became extinct, several of the families connecting themselves with the Presbyterian church.

X The Forest Church, near Middletown, had a third part of his time. The meeting-house was built in 1750: those who had been hearers and elders in Hutcheson's church at Bohemia united in erecting the building, under the style of the Congregation of Bohemia and Appoquinimy. Some families held pews in both churches, and attended regularly at both.

Rodgers established and maintained successfully the public stated catechizing of the congregation, not confining the service by any means to the young, and connecting it with the annual pastoral visit to every family.

With far-seeing sagacity, he raised among his people, in 1751, money to establish a permanent fund; little thinking that, even in his lifetime, the congregation would be so reduced in numbers as to owe to the annual proceeds of that fund the privilege of hearing the gospel statedly preached.

He did not neglect the vacancies hopelessly sinking out of existence all along the peninsula. He often visited them. At Church Hill, in Queen Anne's, where the labours of Robinson and Davies had been greatly blessed, he baptized twenty-nine adults on the same day in which many others were admitted to the communion.

In 1754, he declined, as soon as it was tendered, an invitation to visit New York with a view to settlement. He was called thither in January, 1765; and the presbytery referred to the synod for advice whether they should put the call in his hands. Tennent and Finley both recommended him highly: "some* say he is nearly equal to the late Mr. Davies." A few days after, he received a call from the Independent Church in Charleston. Whitefield was at St. George's soon after, and told him he thought his work was done there; but, though familiar with the condition of the two cities, he could not decide which call he should accept. The synod, after considering the matter for three days, was nearly unanimous as to his duty to go to New York. The pastoral relation was dissolved, May 18, 1765, and he was installed in his new charge, September 4, having the Rev. Joseph Treat as colleague: Johnes presided, and Caldwell preached. So fearful had they been of not securing him, that they applied to Suffolk Presbytery to use their influence in their behalf, and, with their commissioner, sent Caldwell, of Elizabethtown, to plead for them before Newcastle Presbytery. X

"A considerable revival of religion almost immediately ensued: a large number were brought to the knowledge of the truth." So much did the congregation increase that, in the spring of 1766, the foundation of the Brick Church was laid, and the house was opened on New Year's day, 1768.

A new attempt was made to obtain a charter, in March, 1766. Lord Dartmouth, President of the Privy Council, sincerely favoured it; but the Bishop of London appeared twice before the Lords of Trade and Plantations to oppose it. His lordship said,† the Churchmen in New York were fearful at that time that the Dissenters would unite with the Established Church of Scotland. The petition was rejected, August 26, 1767. Dr. Chandler, Church minister of Elizabethtown, boldly avowed, that the reason why it was refused was because William Smith, Esq., was one of the petitioners. His opposition to Church encroachments was not to be forgiven. Dr. Johnson, of King's College, told Archbishop Secker that "the book by Smith was the principal cause of the complaints against the Venerable Society and the missionaries: there is nothing the Dissenters will stick at."

Dr. Laidlie, of the Dutch Reformed Church, and Dr. John Mason, of the Associate Church, joined with Rodgers and the three eminent lawyers of his congregation (William Livingston, William Smith, and John Morin Scott) in a number of publications on the impolicy and dangers of the introduction of bishops

* Bellamy MSS.

† Collections of Protestant Episcopal Church Historical Society.

into the colonies: "De Laune's Plea for Non-conformity" was printed and widely circulated.

Governor Tryon was the bearer of a petition for a charter in 1774, and obtained an order from the king in council, granting the request. The charter was drafted, and passed the governor and Council, and was placed in the hands of Kemp, the king's attorney, to report thereon. There it laid till the Declaration of Independence divested king, Council, and attorney of power

"To tithe and toll in these dominions."

In the close of February, 1776, Rodgers, with many others, removed their families from New York, expecting that a speedy effort would be made to seize the city and hold it for the Crown. Placing his family with his son-in-law,—the Rev. William M. Tennent, of Greenfield, Connecticut,—he became chaplain of General Heath's brigade in April, and, on resigning, spent the winter in Georgia. He was elected chaplain of the State Convention, and then of the Council of Safety and of the first legislature, and continued in the discharge of these duties till the burning of Esopus, in October, 1777. From that time till the war closed, he laboured at Amenia, in Dutchess county, then at Danbury, Connecticut, and, for eighteen months, at Lamington, New Jersey.

On his return to New York the parsonage was gone, having been consumed in the great fire, soon after the royal troops entered the city. The Wall Street Church had been converted into barracks, and the Brick Church into a hospital, and left in a ruinous state. The vestry of Trinity Church—"Whig Episcopalians"—offered the use of St. Paul's and St. George's; and Rodgers preached in them, alternately, from November, 1783, till June, 17—.

The congregation had lost some valuable members, but it was still large. The churches were repaired, almost rebuilt; and, Treat having been dismissed, though a number warmly urged his stay, a colleague was sought; and, in a few years, another was needed. A third church was built in 1796, and another minister associated with the three others in one joint session.

Rodgers was the moderator of the first General Assembly, in 1789. After 1803, he ceased to preach more than once on the Sabbath, and, from that time, read his discourses, being then seventy-seven. He preached for the last time in September, 1809. At the communion, in December, he attempted to serve a table; but his recollection so entirely failed him that with the utmost difficulty he got through the service. "The tears of hundreds witness their mingled respect and sympathy for the beloved pastor, now sinking into the grave."

His memory failed, but no pious habit declined, no devout affection abated. In the evening preceding his death, he prayed with his family, three times making supplication for his beloved people. The next morning he proposed to convene the family for prayer, but soon fell asleep. He awoke speechless; and, by signs expressing his wonted hope and consolation, he waited his appointed time. At about four in the afternoon of May 7, 1811, in his eighty-fourth year, he entered into rest.

Sixty and four were the years of his ministry. Dr. Griffin testifies that his influence, and that of McWhorter, in their old age, was most healthful, and kept alive in our church a remembrance of the years of the right hand of the Most High, a sense of the importance of revivals, and a longing for their return, such as was not to be found in New England. He overlived all the ministers who had seen the Great Revival and had felt the evils of the disruption, and who had rejoiced in the successful establishment of the College of New Jersey, and the union of the church in the Synod of New York and Philadelphia. He lived to see the gloomy clouds, that hung over our land so ominously for years after the Revolution, roll away, and to witness the enlargement and prosperity of our church beyond all the most sanguine expectations of his youth.

Whitefield, who had failed, though using the agency of the Marquis of Lothian, in procuring a Doctorate in Divinity for Burr, was successful, by the aid of Franklin, in obtaining that honour for Rodgers from the University of Edinburgh, in 1768.

He married, in 1752, the daughter of Colonel Peter Bayard, of Bohemia, in Cecil county, Maryland, of whose family six were converted under Whitefield. She was the mother of Dr. John R. B. Rodgers,* an eminent physician and a ruling elder, and of the wife of the Rev. Dr. Tennent, of Abingdon.

It was the good fortune of our church that Rodgers should have had associated with him that admirable man, Dr. Samuel Miller; for through his indefatigable and wise care was preserved, in his "Memoir of Rodgers," all that was then known of our early history.

* Named after her only brother, who died in 1756, aged seventeen.