

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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ALEXANDER HEWAT, D. D.

1763—1776.

FROM THE REV. THOMAS SMYTH, D. D.

CHARLESTON, S. C., May 22, 1857.

My dear Sir: Your patient and patriotic labours, though most timely and even early, are nevertheless too late, as it regards many of the fathers, the founders of our Church. Many of these were men of note in their native land, thoroughly instructed in all the learning of the age, endued with heavenly gifts, and capable of occupying, as burning and shining lights, the most prominent positions. They left home, and country, and prospects, and not unfrequently positions of eminence, in the spirit of true missionary, self-sacrificing zeal. They were willing for a season to be obscure and unknown, having their record on high, and leaving their names written upon the fleshly tables of hearts regenerated and saved through their instrumentality, and in the book of God's remembrance. They sleep in our silent grave yards, around the sanctuaries erected for them in the wilderness, now often deserted for more convenient locations, and left to mouldering decay. In some cases, not even a stone marks the spot of burial—more frequently, where a rude stone, procured with difficulty, stands as a monument of the veneration of their bereaved flocks, no carved line tells the story of their lives. Living in tents or log cabins, and amid the daily vicissitudes of frontier life and Indian treachery, they had but little opportunity for study, and no inducements to write or publish.

As the winds that still breathe their soft requiem through the pine groves of the forest, collect the scattered leaves in some quiet eddy, there to slumber in decay, so will there be sometimes found garnered in the silent chambers of home, heart, public document, or private letter, fading memories of these forgotten worthies, waking up, like the echo of a far off trumpet heard amid the vallies of a range of hills, the tenderest emotions of the soul.

To these I love to listen, and these forest nooks I delight to visit. They are fruitful of suggestion, and pregnant with the most healthful and hopeful lessons. They link the past to the present, and the present to the future. They give reality to the unity of the Church in all ages. They enrol us among the glorious procession of the servants of God who have preceded us, and as they sowed the good seed, watered it with tears and prayers, and cultivated it with the most assiduous toil, and we have entered into their labours, so are we, while reaping their harvest, preparing the crop for a future in-gathering.

Surely, if every adventurous attempt to trace up the Nile to its source, and to fathom the depths of the African desert, is commendable, much more should every endeavour to glean the scattered leaves of traditionary history, and to interpret the soft, dying echoes of its distant events, be welcome to every Christian heart. You will, I hope, be encouraged in your artistic efforts to reproduce to the present and future generations the portraits of many of those prophets of the Lord, who, as the voice of one crying in the wilderness, have prepared the way for this glorious day of our country's progress in political and Christian civilization, and who, being dead

shall thus continue to speak to us, and to look down encouragingly upon those who are bearing the burden and heat of the day.

Among the numerous names that dignify the early history of the Presbyterian Church in South Carolina, is that of its distinguished Historian, Alexander Hewat, who was born and educated in Scotland, and who, after occupying for many years the pastoral relation to the First—or as it is often called the Scotch—Presbyterian Church in the city of Charleston, returned to Great Britain,—for what causes is unknown, and most probably lived and laboured in London until his decease.

All that can be at present known concerning him from sources on this side the Atlantic, is contained in the following extract of a letter from my honourable friend, Mitchell King, a ruling elder in that church, and one of the oldest living residents in Charleston. His reminiscences and papers will constitute a very interesting and important chapter in the early history of our Church in this State. Judge King writes as follows:—

“The Rev. Dr. ALEXANDER HEWAT, the first Historian of South Carolina, was, it is believed, a native of Scotland. He received, as he tells us, (*Sermons* 1 vol. 386,) his grammatical education at Kelso. The first Presbyterian Church in Charleston, from the time of the Rev. Archibald Stobo,—a survivor of the ministers who accompanied the Scottish adventurers to the unfortunate Colony of New Caledonia, had usually been supplied with pastors from Scotland. Up to the time of the arrival of Stobo in Charleston, in 1700, the Presbyterians and Congregationalists had worshipped together. But within a few years after, they occupied different buildings, and adhered to the organization of their respective churches. The early Records of the First Presbyterian Church here—usually called, both before and since the Revolution, the Scotch Church—have not been carefully preserved, and only a few rather disconnected but authentic and precious relics of them remain. When the church required a minister, the congregation usually remitted funds to some friends in Scotland, to defray expenses, and solicited some distinguished gentlemen there to select and send an eligible pastor to them. This was, no doubt, done in the case of Dr. Hewat; as was afterwards done in the case of Buist. The Records of the Church in Dr. Hewat’s own handwriting show that, on the 20th of March, 1763, he presided as Moderator at a meeting of the Session; and in the Record of the members of the St. Andrews’ Society of Charleston, admitted in that year, his name is at the head of the list. From the day that he arrived in Charleston, until he finally left it, he continued devoted to his pastoral duties. The day on which he sailed, on his return to Europe, has not been ascertained. It appears from entries in the Records of the Church that he presided as Moderator at a meeting of the Session on the 22d of November, 1773, and again on the 23d of May, 1774. And on the 9th of May, 1775, it is recorded that the Rev. James Latta was married to Sarah Wilson—by virtue of a license from his Honour the Lieutenant Governor, (then the Honourable William Bull,) directed to the Rev. Alexander Hewat. So that no reasonable doubt can exist that on the 9th of May, 1775, he was still in Charleston. Indeed it is highly probable that he remained until some time in 1776; for, in his *History*, (2d vol. 299,) he states that the Capital of the South Carolina Society, in that year, “had arisen to a sum not less than £68,787 10s. 3d.,” and it is very unlikely that, after he left the country, he had the opportunity or the inclination to

obtain such minute information. A tradition was prevalent fifty years ago among the senior members of his church—which is well recollected by some who are now seniors—that he was intimate in the family of Governor Bull, and was essentially aided by him in collecting the materials from which he wrote his History. It is believed that the near prospect of a war between the Colonies and the Mother country, induced him to leave South Carolina. His History appeared in London in 1779. His attachment to those who had been his flock in Carolina continued, and was cordially returned by them. The venerable Dr. Robert Wilson and Robert Rowand, who had been members of his Session from the time of his arrival, were spared to the Church for at least the first decade of the present century, and when the Congregation, in 1792, sent to Scotland for a pastor, Dr. Hewat was associated with the Rev. Doctors Robertson and Blair in the important commission. His absence from Edinburgh alone prevented him from joining in its execution. From this time until the 28th of September, 1820, we have little information of Dr. Hewat on which we can confidently rely, except what may be gleaned from his Sermons in two volumes, published in London in 1803–1805. He was married to a widow lady of Carolina, (Mrs. Burksdale,) who had visited Europe for the benefit of the health of two of her children.

“He certainly continued to correspond with some of his old friends. A copy of his Sermons sent to one of them, accompanied by a friendly letter, is now before the writer. But the friend to whom they were sent, has long since paid the debt of nature, and the letter is among the things that were. The Doctor is believed to have had a pastoral charge in or near London, and to have spent the latter part of his life principally in or near that city. On the 28th of September, 1820, from the Carolina Coffee House, Birchen Lane, Cornhill—a resort formerly well known to all gentlemen of Carolina who visited London, he addressed a letter to Mr. George Edwards, Charleston, S. C., and transmitted to him some memorials likely to interest him. That letter, by the kindness of a friend, has been presented to the Charleston Library Society, and is now preserved among their literary treasures. It is a touching proof of his affectionate memories, and closes in a manner worthy of a Christian minister—“Farewell, God bless you and all Friends in Carolina;” and that spirit animated him to the last. He is believed to have died in London in 1828, or early in 1829, and in his will he remembers the people of his Church in Charleston, and leaves them a legacy of £50 sterling, which, after the deduction of the English legacy duty, was, on the 4th of October, 1829, received by the Treasurer of the Church. An absence of more than fifty years had not chilled his affection for them, or effaced his relations to them from his memory. In his History of South Carolina, how unpretending soever it may be, he has erected a monument to himself that time will not destroy. May we not hope that the seeds of virtue and piety which in twelve years of faithful and acceptable ministry he planted among us, may, in obedience to the decrees of an overruling Providence, be yet producing good fruit, and lead to joyful recognitions between him and his Charleston friends in another and a better world.

The name of Dr. Alexander Hewat, or rather his surname *Hewat*, is an instance, to a very limited degree, of the differences that often occur in the spelling of proper names. No doubt can exist of the way in which he spelled his name. His entries by his own hand in the Record of the Presbyterian

Church of Charleston, his letter to Mr. Edwards, and the title pages of his published Sermons, leave no doubt that his uniform orthography was *Hewat*. It is so always given by the Historian, Dr. David Ramsay, who probably knew him well. Yet Mr. B. R. Carroll, in his valuable work—*Historical Collections of South Carolina*—always spells the name *Hewit*; and Watt, in that most laborious work,—*Bibliotheca Britannica*, gives us *Hewatt* as the author of the Sermons—*Hewit* as the author of the History. The mistake has probably arisen from the fact that the name of the author of the History was not given with it in 1779. There is not the least doubt that Dr. Alexander Hewat was the author of both the History and the Sermons.

The name of *Hewat* is not unknown in the early history of the Protestant Church of Scotland. In 1598, Mr. Peter Hewat, the precise orthography of our Hewat, was one of the ministers of the Presbyterian Church in Edinburgh. His name appears repeatedly in the 5th, 6th, and 7th volumes of Calderwood's *History of the Kirk of Scotland*, edited by the Wodrow Society, 1842, 1849. In July, 1617, he was tried at St. Andrews before James the First,—himself President of the Ecclesiastical Court, and condemned for opposing the Royal proclamation intended to impose Episcopacy upon Scotland. He was deprived,—(that is, deposed from his preferment,) and imprisoned in Dundee. Our Alexander Hewat may have been a descendant or kinsman of this Peter Hewat, as our Rev. Dr. John Forrest, now the Pastor of the Church once occupied by Dr. Alexander Hewat, is, I believe a descendant or kinsman of Thomas Forrest, Vicar of Dolor (Dollar,) who in February 1538-9 paid the penalty of martyrdom on the Castle Hill of Edinburgh for disobedience to what he believed to be the anti-christian commands of his ecclesiastical superiors. In 1617, James was urging Episcopacy on the good people of Scotland, and exercising that unhallowed authority which brought his son, the First Charles, to the scaffold, and in 1688 drove the second James and the legal heirs of the incorrigible and doomed race of Stuarts forever from the throne.

“It may be proper to remark that the surname of Peter Hewat in Calderwood, is occasionally spelled *Ewart*, but beyond doubt they belonged to the same man, and *Hewat* was the true common family name.”

Judge King adds the following as a postscript to the letter of which the above is an extract:—

“Since writing the above, it has occurred to me to endeavour to verify the date of the arrival of Dr. Hewat in Carolina, by referring to some files of old newspapers which we have in the Charleston Library. I had so ascertained the time as to make an investigation for an indefinite period unnecessary. After spending nearly two weary hours in turning over the dusty numbers of the *South Carolina Gazette* for 1762-3-4, I discovered in a rather obscure place of the *Gazette* of the 5th and 12th of November, 1763, a notice of the arrival, in the course of the week, of the Rev. Mr. Hewitt for the Scots meeting. There can be no doubt that this is our Mr. Hewat. I know not how to reconcile this date with that of the 20th of March, 1763, in our old Church Records, which I still believe to be in his hand-writing. The entry of his name on the Roll of the St. Andrew's Society might very well have been made on the 30th of November, 1763. For he would in all probability join the Society at the next meeting after his arrival, on the day of the Patron Saint. The Pastor of the Scotch Church has generally, if not always, been the Chaplain of the Society.”

I have little doubt that you have in the above extract, every thing concerning Dr. Hewat, that can now be recovered.

I remain very affectionately,

Yours in the Lord,

THOMAS SMYTH.

JOHN ROSBRUGH.*

1763—1777.

JOHN ROSBRUGH was born in Ireland in the year 1717; though his father's family had previously migrated thither from Scotland. He came to this country accompanied by a brother and sister in the year 1735. He was married early, and within less than a year lost his wife, who left an infant that survived her but a short time. This distressing bereavement was the means of awakening him to serious reflection, and of leading him to enter upon a religious life. He began now, though he was quite advanced in years, to turn his thoughts towards the Gospel ministry. He had already learned a trade; but had been so well educated in all the elementary branches, that he was capable of teaching a school; and it was by this means chiefly that he was enabled to prepare himself for College. He was graduated at the College of New Jersey in 1761, having, during his collegiate course, received aid from the fund for pious students collected by Tennent and Davies.

He studied Theology under the direction of the Rev. John Blair, then of Fagg's Manor. He was taken on trials by the New Brunswick Presbytery on the 22d of May, 1762, and was licensed to preach on the 18th of August, 1763. His first field of labour was in what is now Warren County, N. J.; and in October, 1764, he was called to Mansfield, Greenwich, and Oxford. He was ordained at Greenwich, December 11, 1764; was dismissed from the three congregations, April 18, 1769; and on the same day was called to the Forks of Delaware—Brainerd's "Irish settlement." [Forks West is now Allentown; Forks North is Mount Bethel.] The Synod transferred the Congregations in the Forks to the New Brunswick Presbytery, and he was installed as their pastor on the 28th of October, 1772. Here he remained during the rest of his life. He was married about 1766 to Jean, daughter of James Ralston, an elder in the Allentown Church. By this marriage he had five children.

Mr. Rosbrugh was a warm friend to his country's liberties, and finally fell a martyr to his patriotism. When Washington, with his dispirited and broken forces, retreated through New Jersey, before the superior army of the British, this excellent minister and devoted patriot joined with some of his neighbours of a like spirit, in forming a military company; and when they marched, he left his family and flock, and marched with them, in the capacity of a private soldier, and, like the rest, bearing his own musket. At Philadelphia he received the commission of a Chaplain to the regiment

* Notices in the Presbyterian by Rev. Archibald Alexander, D. D.—MSS. from Mr. Rosbrugh's his family, Rev. Smith Sturges, and Rev. Richard Webster.