

✓
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.

—
VOLUME IV.
—

NEW YORK:
ROBERT CARTER & BROTHERS,
530 BROADWAY.
1858.

Entered according to Act of Congress, in the year 1856.

By ROBERT CARTER & BROTHERS,

In the Clerk's Office of the District Court of the United States for the Southern
District of New York.

Dr. Inglis had many excellent moral qualities, and fine domestic traits, upon which it is needless to enlarge. He also evinced a truly devout spirit, though I do not claim for him, as he certainly did not claim for himself, an exemption from the infirmities of our common humanity. By his congregation, as well as by his more immediate friends, he was tenderly and deservedly beloved. I will only add that

I am yours as ever,

THOMAS B. BALCH.

CONRAD SPEECE, D. D.

1801—1836.

FROM THE REV. WILLIAM BROWN.

AUGUSTA COUNTY, Va., April 26, 1856.

Dear Sir: You have kindly requested me to send you a brief memoir of my immediate predecessor, REV. CONRAD SPEECE, D. D. His name is well worthy of a place among those whom the good would love to remember. He was a true son of Virginia—was born, lived, and died in her bosom. He was great among the greatest of her preachers,—few proclaiming the Gospel more abundantly, or more powerfully. A man too of acknowledged genius and learning, of sincere piety, of warm friendships, of attractive social qualities, all together making him the life of every company he entered.

Many will think at once of his almost herculean frame, six feet and two inches of height, and, in its prime, about two hundred and thirty pounds of weight—rawboned and muscular withal. Without the slightest pretensions to gracefulness either of person or manner, his presence was very striking, and once seen, he was never forgotten. The lapse of twenty years still finds thousands in our churches with vivid impressions of his sermons—chaste in style—laden with massive matter—here and there a turn of thought or expression surprisingly original. In manner plain and solemn, save an occasional remark of outbreking oddity,—a thing not without regret to his best friends, as well as to himself, but so much a part and parcel of Dr. Speece as to place it fairly beyond all help. And how many of us seem yet to hear the deep tones of his German voice, as it swelled out from the pulpit in the bass of his well known favourites, Mear, St. Martin's, and Old Hundred!

His father's name was Conrad Speece, the son of Conrad Speece, who migrated to this country early in the last century from Manheim, a town of Baden in Germany. The name of his mother was Ann Catharine Tournay, whose ancestry was from Deux-Ponts in France. He was born in the town of New London, Bedford County, Va., November 7, 1776. While his parents had but little of this world's goods, they were of excellent character for honesty and industry. His mother was a woman of approved piety. His father was not a member of any church, but before his death, which was in 1820, gave full expression to his entire trust in Christ as his Saviour.

In 1781, the family removed a few miles from New London, where the subject of this notice was employed in agricultural labours till 1792,

enjoying the slender advantages afforded by the common schools of the neighbourhood. It was through the instrumentality of my father, Rev. Samuel Brown, who had been one of his teachers, and had discovered his uncommon capacity, that arrangements were about this time made for his entering a grammar school near New London, where his successive instructors were Mr. Edward Graham, afterwards long a Professor in Washington College, and the late Rev. George A. Baxter, D. D.* After a few weeks of slow and embarrassed experiments, his progress was remarkably rapid. The death of his mother, in 1795, was the means of deepening the impressions of those religious truths she had early instilled into his mind. A few months afterwards he entered the Academy of Liberty Hall, since changed to Washington College, and at that time presided over by the Rev. William Graham, its distinguished founder. Here new associates soon banished serious things in a measure from his thoughts. But in a little while his interest was renewed and deepened. In the contemplation, however, of some of the most mysterious doctrines of Scripture, he was driven by the tempter—or, to give his own words—“by my own ignorance, and pride”—to the brink of infidelity. His rescue from this peril was by means of Jenyns’ *Internal Evidence*, and Beattie’s *Evidences*, put into his hands by Mr. Graham. After a deep struggle, in which he discovered, as never before, the depravity of his heart, and the need of a Divine Helper, he found righteousness, and strength, and peace in Jesus Christ. His plans of life, which had been formed for the profession of a lawyer, were now speedily changed to the purpose of preaching the Gospel. In April, 1796, he was admitted to the communion of the Presbyterian Church at New Monmouth, (Lexington had no church at that time,) and, in September following, was received a candidate under the care of the Presbytery of Lexington. His teacher in Theology was Mr. Graham. Certain difficulties, arising in his mind on the subject of Infant Baptism, led to the postponement of his licensure; and in the spring of 1799, he became a Tutor in Hampden Sidney College, then under the Presidency of his intimate friend, the late Archibald Alexander, D. D. In April, 1800, he considered it his duty to be immersed by a Baptist clergyman, and without any preliminary formality, began to preach the Gospel. But Dr. Alexander, having, shortly after this, found relief from the doubts which had also troubled his mind on the same subject, soon convinced Mr. Speece of the necessity of re-examining the whole argument. The result was that his opinions became finally and fully settled in favour of Infant Baptism; and, having respectfully withdrawn from the Baptist Communion, he was, on the 9th of April, 1801, regularly licensed to preach the Gospel by the Presbytery of Hanover.

Weary of a college life, and wishing full employment in his ministry, he left Hampden Sidney in the autumn of this year, and was appointed by the Synod of Virginia as a kind of general missionary. During the period of this service, his labours were spread over a large part of Eastern Virginia, as well as along the extent of the great valley West of the Blue Ridge. In February, 1803, he commenced his connection with a Church in Montgomery County, Md., called Captain John, of which, at the time of his ordination by the Presbytery of Baltimore, April 22, 1804, he was installed

* From both of these gentlemen he received valuable aid.

Pastor. But his health becoming much impaired by successive attacks of fever, this connection was dissolved in April, 1805. During 1806, he preached in the Counties of Goochland and Fluvanna; and then, until 1812, in the Counties of Powhatan and Cumberland, Va.

In October, 1813, he was installed Pastor of Augusta Church, to which he had received a unanimous call. Here was the field of his labours for about twenty-two years, and until he was removed by death. Augusta Church is eight miles from Staunton, Va., and immediately on the main road through the Great Valley of the State,—one of the most fertile and beautiful sections of our country. It may be called the venerable mother of Presbyterianism in Virginia, having been, conjointly with Tinkling Spring, the First Church in which a regular Pastor was settled. In 1740, the Rev. John Craig,* a native of Ireland, and who had been educated at the University of Edinburgh, became its first Pastor. This was seven years before Samuel Davies visited the Colony. In 1747, their rude log structure gave place to the substantial edifice now used. At the time of its erection there was no vehicle with wheels to be found in the settlement. The rocks were all drawn on sledges, while the glass and the nails were brought on pack-horses from Williamsburg, a distance of two hundred miles. Richmond had then no existence. When Braddock's defeat, in 1755, spread terror over the whole frontier country, the hardy Scotch Irish of this community, under the superintendence of their pastor, constructed a substantial stockade fort around their church; and this, on many occasions, was their refuge from the savage foe. Its lines are still visible. Both pastor and people often carried the fatal rifle to the house of God. This congregation has been remarkable for its good order and harmony. No inconsiderable proof of this is to be found in the fact that, during its entire existence of one hundred and sixteen years, it has had but four pastors. The sepulchres of three are in the graveyard with their people, and the fourth is yet in the prime of life. It was in the bosom of this community Dr. Speece quietly fed the flock which the great Shepherd gave him, among the green pastures, and along the beautiful streams of our lovely valley. Here his peaceful life,—as with many of our best ministers,—however useful, and fruitful of eternal results, was yet unmarked by striking events. Any attempt at minute detail would swell this sketch far beyond its due measure. All that it is necessary to say may be gathered into a few particulars.

1. As a *Pastor*, he was faithful and laborious. He was not indeed commonly thought so well fitted, in some respects, for the details of private pastoral intercourse as some others. And it was, perhaps, a consciousness

* JOHN CRAIG was born in the parish of Dunagor, County of Antrim, Ireland, August 17, 1709. After attending to most of the branches of a liberal education, in his own country, he went to Scotland, and became a member of the College of Edinburgh, where he graduated Master of Arts in the year 1732. He came to this country in 1734, arriving at Newcastle on the Delaware, on the 17th of August of that year. He appeared before the Donegal Presbytery in the autumn of 1736, and was taken on trial the next spring, and licensed, August 30, 1738. In the autumn of 1739, he received a call to settle at West Conococheague, which he declined. At the close of that year he was sent to Western Virginia, and commenced the Presbyterian interest in Augusta. He gathered the two Congregations of Augusta and Tinkling Spring, and was installed as their Pastor in September, 1740. In the great schism of the Presbyterian Church, he sympathized strongly with the Old Side. He resigned the pastoral charge of Tinkling Spring in November, 1754, and preached a Sermon on the occasion which was printed, for the first time, in the Baltimore Literary and Religious Magazine, in 1840. He remained in charge of the Augusta Church till the close of his life. He died on the 21st of April, 1774, in the sixty-fifth year of his age. In the region in which he lived, his memory is still held in high veneration.

of this which led to the more special concentration of his energies upon the work of public preaching. Here was unquestionably his great strength, and in this his labours were abundant. The discourses delivered by him during his connection with this congregation numbered three thousand, embracing an uncommon variety of texts. Nor was his ministry unblessed of God. Three hundred and fifty names were added to the church upon profession of their faith. The attachment of his people was uncommonly strong; and when he received, only a few years before his death, a unanimous invitation to become the Pastor of the Presbyterian Church in Staunton, the proposal was instantly met by a strong and unanimous opposition from his congregation.

2. As a *Ruler* in the Church of God, his services were of great value. His place was seldom vacant in our judicatories, and when present, he devoted his attention closely to the business in hand. A judgment of uncommon soundness on all matters embraced in the deliberations of such bodies, gave his opinions great influence in our Presbytery, and Synod, and General Assembly.

3. Among the *Benevolent operations* of the day the Bible Society was his favourite; and upon this he bestowed liberal benefactions. In the cause of African Colonization also he took a deep interest. The Annual Reports which he drew up for the Society in this county contain sentiments hardly surpassed, in force and compass of view, by any to be met with elsewhere on that subject. But the Temperance reformation, more than any other movement, drew out the utmost powers of his mind in its promotion. Kind in his feelings, wise in his measures, and of conservative views, he abhorred the denunciations of some, and the extravagancies of others; but was, through all, an uncompromising foe of intemperance. All over this community, and wherever occasion offered, he brought down his huge battle axe upon the head of this deadly evil, and with prodigious effect.

4. The published productions of Dr. Speece are of a merit fairly claiming for him honourable mention as an *Author*. The most considerable production of his pen is "The Mountaineer,"—a small volume containing fifty-six papers, written in 1813–1816, and after the manner of "The Spectator." It has gone through three editions,—is highly creditable to the writer, and some of the pieces are of great excellence.

From manuscripts of Dr. S. in my possession, I find that his other publications number in all one hundred and fifty, both in prose and in verse, and upon a great variety of subjects. The most important of his poetical compositions is an excellent hymn under the title—"The Cross of Christ,"—first published, as many of his pieces were, in the Connecticut Evangelical Magazine, Vol. 2. It is now the 372d Hymn of the General Assembly's Collection. This was written when he was twenty-four years of age.

His published Sermons are,—“Christ Crucified:” preached by appointment before the General Assembly, May 21, 1810; on Proverbs xxi. 31: preached in Cumberland, Va., August 20, 1812, the day appointed by the President of the United States for humiliation and prayer; on the death of Mrs. Martha Nicholas, 1812; on Ecclesiastes xii. 10: preached at the opening of the Presbytery of Lexington, 1824; on Isaiah lv. 10, 11: preached in Fredericksburg, Va., at the ordination and installation of Rev. Samuel B. Wilson, 1824; on the death of Mrs. Elizabeth Hendren, 1832.

He was also a large contributor to the Virginia Evangelical and Literary Magazine, edited by his intimate friend, the lamented John H. Rice, D. D.

In October, 1835, he attended the meeting of the Synod of Virginia in Prince Edward for the last time, and presided over its deliberations. This meeting will be long remembered as one of great interest, to which the visit of the venerable Dr. Alexander to the scene of his early ministry greatly contributed. In that Synod he still found, among his long tried friends, Doctors Baxter, Hill, and Speece. The Sabbath day was a feast indeed to hundreds. Dr. Alexander preached in the morning; and who ever heard even *him* preach better? But the sermon did not surpass the interest excited by the address preceding the administration of the Lord's Supper, delivered by Dr. Speece. The simplicity, the originality, the subdued, but elevated fervour pervading it throughout, made it almost inimitable. How many Christians felt, that day, as if brought to "the very gate of Heaven!" And when, with deep and tender emotions, he referred to the penitent thief on the cross, and his own hope soon to enter the Heavenly world, and his wish to search out that thief among the happy throng, and taking him by the hand to say—"My brother, now tell me, under all the circumstances of the case, which of us, poor sinners, is the greater debtor to the grace of our Divine Saviour?"—the effect upon the assembly was overwhelming.

From Prince Edward he made a final visit to his old friends in the Counties of Powhatan and Cumberland. Of his feelings during this visit in Eastern Virginia he makes a brief record on his return home: "During this excursion below the Blue Ridge, I have been as one walking in a fascinating but melancholy dream. Emigration, and death still more, have taken away many of the old friends in that region whom I loved; and the few that remain, appeared to me, for the most part, strikingly marked with the traces of age and debility. I seemed to be looking at countenances of which time had stolen the half, or two thirds, or even a greater proportion, forever away. Thus 'we all do fade as a leaf:' but blessed be God, we hope to obtain a better world, where sorrow, and infirmity, and death are known no more." To that "better world" he was fast drawing near. On Sabbath, December 27, 1835, and within a very few minutes after leaving the pulpit, he was seized with a violent pain in his left breast, (angina pectoris,) causing him almost instantaneously to faint, and sink to the floor. The sensation experienced he afterwards compared, in his own graphic way, to "a kind of *invisible rifle-shot*." Under powerful applications immediately administered he soon revived, and the threatening symptoms of the disease were abated. He now evidently anticipated a sudden death. "What a solemn warning was this to me to be ready, at a moment's notice, for the summons to eternity! God give me grace so to use this awful dispensation of his providence."

He lived to preach five discourses after this, but manifestly under great physical prostration. His last was on Saturday, February 15, 1836. It was a Temperance Sermon on the text "Is this thy kindness to thy friend?"—and was thought by his friends one of the very best they had ever heard from him. On the next morning, the Sabbath, and while riding to the church, he was again attacked by the same terrible disease, but not with the same violence as before. But he was waiting for the "coming of the Lord." He expressed to all around his entire confidence in the Saviour. On Monday night, and when he was thought to be recovering, the final summons

came, and in a few moments he yielded up his spirit to "God who gave it." He died in the sixtieth year of his age.

Believe me, dear Sir, most sincerely yours,

WILLIAM BROWN.

FROM THE REV. HENRY RUFFNER, D. D.

LEXINGTON, Va., January 28, 1848.

Rev. and dear Sir: I have just received your letter asking for my impressions respecting the late Rev. Dr. Speece. I give them cheerfully, but, owing to a pressure of other engagements, less fully and deliberately, than I otherwise should.

Dr. Speece manifested his capacity for scholarship at an early age. Edward Graham, Esq., late Professor in our Washington College, was teaching a classical school in the New London Academy, not far from old Mr. Speece's, when Conrad was sent thither to learn whatever he could or would. Mr. Graham beheld in him an awkward, uncouth Dutch boy, apparently overgrown for his age, and to a superficial observer of too rough a material to be polished into any sort of refinement. But he soon saw that he was, mentally at least, a rough diamond. He set him at the Latin Grammar. The big boy looked at it, turned over the leaves from beginning to end, and when called on said his *hic, hæc, hoc, &c.*, very accurately, but rather morosely; saying that he did not understand what it meant, and would rather learn something else. Mr. Graham persuaded him to go on; and so he did, with such accelerated speed and growing encouragement, that he distanced all his class mates, and was no less distinguished for the accuracy than the rapidity of his acquirements. This was the foreshadowing of his future history. But it is not his history, but a delineation of his character, that you request of me.

In person Dr. Speece was tall, large and lubberly—somewhat like the Lexicographer, *Dr. Johnson*. In respect to his intellect, he was remarkable for the clearness, method, and precision of his thoughts, and consequently for the ready command of his knowledge, and the perfect fluency and perspicuity of his expressions. I have heard him utter perhaps millions of words, but I know not that I ever heard him hesitate for a word, or use one that was improper.

He was a great reader of books, both theological and literary. Yet he was not a great student, if by this term we understand a man who studies a particular subject until he is thoroughly acquainted with it. Hence he was not a man of science in the highest sense of the term; but rather a man of extensive knowledge, which his quick and retentive mind had always in its view, like a wide landscape before the eye.

He excelled in conversation; was full of a droll humour, that never hurt, but always diverted, his company. His peculiar humour sometimes showed itself in the pulpit, but on account of its incongruity with the place, not always with happy effect.

As a preacher, he was fluent, clear and instructive. His deep, sonorous voice filled the ears of the largest audience; but he was rather monotonous in the manner of his delivery, and never rose to a very high pitch of eloquence.

He rarely wrote his sermons or spent much time in premeditating them; yet such was his readiness of thought, clearness of method, and perfect propriety of expression, that a literal copy of his extemporaneous discourses would have needed no correction for the press.

He did not excel as a writer. The style of his writings was inferior to that of his extemporaneous discourses, and his ordinary conversation. His ready mind seemed to feel cramped and embarrassed by the slow mechanical process of

writing. Though an admirer of poetry, he had little imagination: his taste was therefore correct rather than delicate, and his style lacked embellishment.

He was a sincere and good-hearted Christian, void of enthusiasm, and hence not of the class called revival preachers. His principles were strictly orthodox, and his morality exemplary; and yet truth requires me to say that his economy, to say the least, verged to a point, beyond which it would have ceased to be a virtue. He was of the German stock of frugal farmers, and though long soaked in Virginianism and Presbyterianism, he still retained some spice of the native sap. He was an old bachelor withal, and having thus the centre of human attraction in the centre of his own self, his whole system tended to contraction. But this was after all a mere blemish in a great and good man; and happy are they whose spotless character shall entitle them to cast a stone at his with its one spot.

Dr. Speece was regular in his attendance upon our Church judicatories, and always showed himself a wise counsellor. As he grew somewhat old, and became more corpulent and more difficult of locomotion, requiring a giant of a horse to carry him, (by the bye, he once crushed his horse to death, when the unfortunate animal fell under his weight, upon a smooth limestone rock,) he complained of the difficulty of getting to Presbytery, when it met over rugged Western mountains, and especially when he had to travel over the worst mountain-road in Virginia—it was over the huge, Wild Cheat Mountain;—and on one occasion he so crippled his horse that he resolved that, after his return, he would never travel that road of cleft rocks, deep mire, and tangled tree-roots again. So when at last, he reached the foot of the mountain next to his home, he solemnly wheeled his horse towards this spruce-covered terror of travellers, doffed his broad-brimmed hat, of inexpressible shape, bowed after his indescribable manner, and said, “Farewell, Cheat Mountain, we shall never meet again.” It was something like Mountain nodding to Mountain, and frowning one at the other.

His distinguished talents and learning procured for him, at middle age, in 1820, the honorary title of Doctor of Divinity from Princeton College; but he was not covetous of public honours nor of high station. Give him his pulpit, his parishioners, his literary friends, and his books; and the world might take all the rest with his hearty consent. I ought perhaps to except *tobacco*—“the weed,” as he called it, which was to him almost as indispensable as books. He was an enormous chewer, and a zealous advocate of the use of this drug. Many were the pleasant and droll sayings that he uttered concerning it. But probably it shortened his days. Old Father Mitchel, of Bedford, used to say, after his eightieth winter, that if tobacco was a poison, it was a slow one, for he had chewed it for seventy years. But Dr. Speece, being only three times as large as Father Mitchel, consumed at least six times as much in twenty-four hours. He literally slept with his cheek full of it.

This is all that I can say off hand about Dr. Speece, and it may at least serve to give you some idea of his peculiar mental and moral constitution.

Yours in brotherhood,

H. RUFFNER.

FROM THE REV. WILLIAM HILL, D. D.

WINCHESTER, Va., April 9, 1848.

Dear Sir: The Rev. Dr. Speece, concerning whom you ask for my reminiscences, was for many years my intimate friend, and I am happy in the opportunity of rendering a tribute to his memory. I shall, however, give you my recollections as they happen to occur, rather than attempt a full portrait of his character.

Nobody who knew Dr. Speece could doubt that he was, in many respects, an extraordinary man. With an uncommonly forbidding exterior, he had a mind of great strength and compass, and was by no means destitute of the milk of human kindness. With his particular friends he would unbend with great familiarity, and render himself exceedingly agreeable; while he was not particularly social among strangers, and towards those for whom he had no respect he maintained a pretty uniformly stern and distant attitude.

He may be said to have had a place among the more eminent preachers of his day. His sermons, though far from being unstudied, were seldom, if ever, written out. His thoughts were strong and pertinent, and his style rather perspicuous than ornate. Had he possessed an agreeable and well modulated voice, and in other respects an attractive manner, he would undoubtedly have enjoyed a measure of popularity as a preacher which he never reached. But in these latter particulars he was very deficient. His voice was coarse, monotonous, and very little susceptible of modulation; while his gestures, if he made any, were stiff and awkward, his head being a little inclined to one side, with a frown on his forehead.

As an illustration of what I have just stated, I may mention a circumstance that occurred between Dr. Speece and the Rev. James Turner, who was one of the most remarkable pulpit orators that Virginia has produced. Mr. Turner was a man of deep feeling, glowing piety, comprehensive genius, and popular talents; but he entered the ministry late in life, and without any very mature preparation for it. But notwithstanding he was in some respects a perfect contrast to Speece, they were still on terms of the most intimate friendship. On one occasion they agreed to go out and spend a week together on a missionary tour through the destitute regions round about. They had sent out notices of a series of appointments beforehand in the part of the country through which they intended to pass. It was agreed between them that they should preach on alternate days; and he who did not preach was always to follow at the close of the sermon with an enforcing exhortation. On one of these occasions, when Speece had finished his sermon, he called upon his brother Turner to exhort; but Turner, in rather an ungracious manner, replied,—“Close the meeting—I have nothing to say.” The secret of it was, that they had had a large congregation, consisting chiefly of persons who seldom had the opportunity of hearing the Gospel; and Turner was so much impressed with the idea that Speece’s sermon had not met the exigency of the case, that it had put him quite out of tune, and he did not dare utter a word, feeling assured that any attempt he might make to speak, would be a failure. When the people had dispersed, Speece said to his friend Turner, “What is the matter with you now?” “Brother Speece, I do not like your preaching at all,” was the reply. “If,” says he, “I could command such sentiments and language as you can, I could prostrate all before me; but you drag along, and let your words drop out of your mouth, like stones out of the tail of a cart. Man, why don’t you fire? Why don’t you put in more powder, and fire clear, and then you might expect to do some execution.” To amuse himself and his friends, and to show his admiration of Mr. Turner, Dr. Speece would often relate this incident.

I might enlarge in respect to the character and habits of my old friend, but what I have written may perhaps be sufficient for your purpose.

Yours truly,

WILLIAM HILL.