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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 III.

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By ROBERT CARTER & BROTHERS,

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

figure, and his dignified, slow, composed walk, all proclaimed the grave, apostolic man of God, who was going to and fro on errands of mercy.

I am, my dear Sir,

Sincerely and affectionately yours,

SAMUEL MILLER

ELIHU SPENCER, D. D.

1748—1784.

FROM THE REV. SAMUEL MILLER, D. D.

PRINCETON, April, 20, 1849.

Rev. and dear Sir : I am happy, in compliance with your request, to send you some notices of the 'Rev. Elihu Spencer, D. D., who was for many years the respected and beloved pastor of the Presbyterian Church in Trenton, N. J., and whose decease in that city, took place in the year 1784.

The ancestors of the family from which this eminent man descended, were five brothers, who emigrated from England to Massachusetts early in the seventeenth century. The eldest of these brothers, *John Spencer*, appears to have been a large landholder, a magistrate, a member of the General Court, and a high military officer in Newtown, now Cambridge, from 1634 to 1638, when he returned to England, and seems to have left no descendants on this side of the Atlantic. *William Spencer* the second brother, also settled in Cambridge, where he was a member of the General Court, and a landed proprietor. He afterwards removed to Connecticut, where he died in 1640, leaving a numerous family. He was the ancestor of the Honourable *Ambrose Spencer*, late Chief Justice of the State of New York. *Thomas Spencer*, the third brother, was also first settled in Cambridge, but removed to Connecticut in 1638; and died in Haddam, the residence of his family, in 1685, leaving a numerous posterity. The Rev. *Ichabod S. Spencer*, D. D., pastor of the First Presbyterian church in Brooklyn, N. Y.; the Honourable *Joshua Austin Spencer* of Utica, and several other eminent men bearing that name in the same State, are among his distinguished descendants. The fourth brother, *Jared Spencer*, originally settled with his brothers at Cambridge. He removed thence in a few years to Lynn, and not long afterwards to Connecticut, when he became one of the first settlers of the town of Haddam. He died in 1685, leaving a large family of children. The Rev. *Elihu Spencer*, the subject of this article, and General *Joseph Spencer*, a distinguished and active military officer during the Revolutionary war, were among his descendants. The fifth brother, *Michael Spencer*, was a joint proprietor with his brother *Jared*, and removed with him to Lynn, where he died in 1653. It is not known to me that any of his posterity remain.

ELIHU SPENCER, the subject of this sketch, was born at East Haddam, Conn., February 12, 1721. He was the son of Isaac and Mary Spencer, and early manifested an active and energetic mind. He commenced a course of literary study, with a view to the Gospel ministry, in the month of March, 1740; entered Yale College in September, 1742; and was graduated A. B. in September, 1746. After his graduation, he was recommended

and urged to undertake a mission among the Indians of the Six Nations. His designation and recommendation to this office came from such men as David Brainerd, whose zeal and labours among another portion of the Indian population of our country are known and celebrated throughout the evangelical world; and Jonathan Edwards the elder, whose reputation and influence, as a great as well as a good man, are, if possible, still more widely diffused. On their recommendation, and under the sanction of the Society in Great Britain, which had fostered the other missions among the Indians, he undertook the arduous task. With this view, after leaving College, he spent a number of months with the Rev. John Brainerd, the surviving brother of David, who was also an eminent missionary among the Indian tribes. Under his direction he employed much time in studying the language of the Indian tribes, to which he contemplated devoting his labours; and with so much success that members of his own family have assured me that he spoke several of the Indian languages with great ease and fluency. And it is particularly recorded of him that he formed a large and accurate vocabulary of the language of the Oneida Tribe, which was deemed of great value. Nor was the study of the Indian languages the only object of his attention, appropriate to the missionary enterprise which he had undertaken. He spent some time in the family of President Edwards at Northampton, availing himself of his experience in Indian missions, and accompanied that eminent man to Albany, for the purpose of being present with him at the solemnities of an Indian treaty of much interest, which was held in that city. He appears also to have spent some months in actual missionary labour in the Western part of the Province of New York. And in pursuance of his favourite object, he was solemnly ordained to the work of the ministry, with a special view to an Indian mission, by an ordaining council in Boston, in September, 1748.

The leadings of Providence, however, appear to have been such as prevented his accomplishing what he and his friends had anticipated in this department of evangelical labour. After leaving Mr. Edwards, he came to Elizabethtown, in New Jersey, where he found the Presbyterian Church vacant in consequence of the death of President Dickinson. Here his preaching was so acceptable that the congregation gave him a call to become their pastor, which he was constrained to accept, and was installed in that office February 7, 1750, in the twenty-ninth year of his age.

In a little less than a year after settling in the pastoral office in Elizabethtown, Mr. Spenceer was married to Miss Joanna Eaton, daughter of John Eaton, Esquire, and Joanna his wife, of Shrewsbury, in New Jersey. This took place on the 15th day of October, 1750, when he was in the thirtieth year of his age, and when the lady whom he married was in her twenty-first year. He remained the pastor of the Church in Elizabethtown about six years. While there, in 1753, he was invited by Governor Belcher to become the Chaplain of the New Jersey regiment, employed in the war then waging with the French and Indians; which he does not appear to have accepted. It was during his residence in Elizabethtown that his character for piety and public spirit prompted the Trustees of the College of New Jersey, then temporarily placed at Newark, to elect him one of the Corporate Guardians of that Institution. This occurred in 1752; and he held this honourable office as long as he lived. In 1756, he left Elizabethtown, and accepted a call to the pastoral charge of the Presbyterian Church at Jamaica,

L. I., where he remained, acceptably and usefully, two years or more. At the end of that time, he was appointed by Governor De Lancey of New York to the Chaplaincy of the New York troops, then about to march and take their place in the French war still raging. This appointment he appears to have accepted; and the Congregation of Jamaica reluctantly gave their consent to his leaving them for that purpose, because they expected their children, who had enlisted in the military service, to be under his spiritual care.

When his services as Chaplain in the army were closed, he transferred his relation from the Presbytery of Suffolk with which he had been connected, to that of New Brunswick, and laboured several years in the contiguous Congregations of Shrewsbury, Middletown Point, Shark River, and Amboy. It was about this time that he addressed a Letter to the Rev. Ezra Stiles, D. D., afterwards President of Yale College, then Pastor of a Church in Newport, R. I., which was published, and attracted no small share of public attention. The subject of it was "The state of the Dissenting Interest in the Middle Colonies of America." This Letter was originally dated at Jamaica, July 2, 1759, and there were some Amendments and Additions to it at Shrewsbury on the 3d of November following. So far as is known to me, this is the only formal important work that he ever committed to the press.

In the year 1764, the venerable Synod of New York and Philadelphia, having reason to believe that a number of their congregations in the Southern parts of our country, and especially in North Carolina, were in an unformed and irregular state, deemed it of great importance to send among them some divines of known wisdom, prudence, and popular talents, who might instruct, counsel and guide them aright, and prepare them for a more orderly and edifying organization. For this important, confidential and arduous service, the Synod selected the Rev. Messrs. Elihu Spencer, and Alexander McWhorter of Newark, N. J. They accepted the appointment; were employed a number of months on this mission; and were considered as having rendered, with much skill and efficiency, a very important service to the Southern Churches.

Soon after Mr. Spencer's return from the South, the Congregation of St. George's in Delaware having become vacant in consequence of Dr. Rodgers, their former pastor, having accepted an invitation to New York, he was called to succeed him in the pastoral charge. This call Mr. Spencer accepted, and spent about five years in St. George's, greatly to the acceptance and benefit of the congregation. Finding the climate, however, unhealthy to himself, and that his large and growing family was every year suffering more and more from epidemic disease, he felt constrained to remove, and in October, 1769, accepted a call to the city of Trenton, in New Jersey, in the pastoral charge of which church he continued, greatly popular, useful and beloved, until he was removed by death.

When the Revolutionary struggle came on, it found Mr. Spencer diligently engaged in his pastoral duties at Trenton. He not only took the course which almost all the Presbyterian ministers in the United States did, decisively in favour of the claims of the Colonies; but, with his constitutional zeal and energy, he became warmly and conspicuously engaged on the patriotic side. This led to another call which was made upon him in 1775, again to visit North Carolina. When he visited that Colony, ten years before, by order of the Synod, he and his companion, Dr. McWhorter,

left such an impression of their talents and piety, and especially of their power in addressing and moving large masses of men, that there was a strong popular desire to engage their services again for a different purpose. The Provincial Congress of that Colony, having reason to believe that the population of several important settlements within their limits, were, partly from ignorance and partly from prejudice in favour of the British government, unfriendly to the cause of Independence, conceived the plan of employing the influence and the patriotic eloquence of the same gentlemen, who had before so ably served them on an evangelical mission. The request was made. It was accepted. Dr. McWhorter accompanied Mr. Spencer, and very valuable services to the cause of Independence were supposed to have been rendered in that part of the Southern country.

It is hardly necessary to say that these active and conspicuous services of Mr. Spencer to the cause of the Whigs greatly embittered towards him the feelings of the Tories. They hated him, threatened him, and on one occasion committed to the flames a large part of his books, and all his most important papers, which happened to fall into their power.

In 1782, the degree of Doctor of Divinity was conferred upon him by the University of Pennsylvania.

His last illness was an inflammatory fever, which terminated his life after a few days, during which he enjoyed abundant Christian support and consolation. His tomb stands in the cemetery connected with the church in Trenton, and bears the following inscription:—

“Beneath this stone lies the body of the Rev. Elihu Spencer, D. D., Pastor of the Presbyterian Church of Trenton, and one of the Trustees of the College of New Jersey, who departed this life on the 27th of December, 1784, in the 64th year of his age. Possessed of fine genius, of great vivacity, of eminent active piety, his merits as a minister and a man stand above the reach of flattery. Having long edified the Church by his talents and example, and finished his course with joy, he fell asleep full of faith, and waiting for the hope of all Saints.”

The accomplishments prominently dwelt upon in this epitaph were really those which shone conspicuously in Dr. Spencer. His piety was ardent; his manners polished, attractive, and full of engaging vivacity; his public spirit and activity in doing good indefatigable; and his character as a preacher singularly prompt, popular and impressive. Whenever, at the meeting of any judicatory, the ministers were at a loss about a preacher, when *he* appeared, the remark was,—“Here comes ready-money Spencer; now we shall have a sermon.” To all this may be added that in the various relations of life he was peculiarly amiable, exemplary and beloved. But on such a character there is no need of enlarging in further detail. It has been justly remarked by a respectable minister of the Gospel, who had well considered his history, “We cannot hesitate to place far above the ordinary grade, a man whom such men as David Brainerd and Jonathan Edwards, the elder, loved and strongly recommended; who was deemed worthy to succeed in their pastoral labours such ministers as Jonathan Dickinson and John Rodgers; whom two Governors, one not of his own denomination, successively appointed to Chaplaincies of a trying and arduous character; who was selected by a venerable Synod to perform a service, evidently calling for peculiar piety, wisdom, and address; and whom an enlightened Provin-

cial Congress deemed the fittest instrument they could find, for accomplishing a most important and delicate patriotic service."

Dr. Spencer had a large and interesting family of children, a number of whom survived him. He had only one son who reached adult age,—*John Spencer*, Esquire, who was bred to the bar, and who died, a number of years since, leaving several children. His second daughter, *Sarah*, married Stephen Lowrey, Esquire, a merchant of Maryland, of which marriage only one daughter now survives. His third daughter, *Margaret*, married Jonathan Dickinson Sergeant, Esquire, a distinguished member of Congress, and Counsellor at the Philadelphia Bar. Of that marriage only three children survive, namely,—the Hon. *John Sergeant*, and the Hon. *Thomas Sergeant*, eminent Jurists, now residing in Philadelphia, and the eldest daughter, *Sarah*, now living in Princeton, the wife of him who gives this account. Dr. Spencer's fourth daughter, *Elizabeth*, married George Merchant, Esquire, an eminent classical teacher, long since deceased, leaving several children. His fifth daughter, *Valeria*, was allied in marriage to Richard Fullerton, Esquire, a broker of Philadelphia, of whom no issue survive. His sixth, *Lydia*, was married to William M. Biddle, Esquire, also a broker of Philadelphia. She is the only one of her father's children still living. She survives, an aged widow, and the mother of several amiable and promising children. Dr. Spencer's eldest and youngest daughters died unmarried.

I am, Rev. and dear Sir,

Very sincerely and respectfully yours,

SAMUEL MILLER.

JOHN MILLER.*

1748—1791.

JOHN MILLER was born in Boston, December 24, (O. S.) 1722. His father was John Miller, a native of Scotland, who migrated to America, and settled in Boston in the year 1710, and not long afterwards married Margaret Bass of Braintree, Mass. He was bred a Presbyterian in his own country, but connected himself in Boston with the Old South Church, then under the pastoral care of the Rev. Dr. Pemberton. Little more is now known of him, than that he was a remarkably grave, shrewd, discreet man, and that he carried on, for a number of years, and with great success, a sugar refinery and distillery in Boston.

John Miller, the elder, had two children; *John* was the eldest—*Joseph*, a younger brother, was never married. Soon after reaching mature age, he embarked on a voyage of commercial enterprise to Great Britain. But the ship in which he sailed is supposed to have foundered at sea. He was never heard of afterwards.

John, the subject of this sketch, was never graduated at any College. He received an excellent classical education at a public school of high

* MS. from his son, Rev. Dr. Samuel Miller.