

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,

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District of New York.

fast, without any painful effort. Before his arrival at middle age, however, he became corpulent, and continued so to the end of life. It came upon him suddenly, like a disease, and no degree of abstinence which he could adopt, appeared to arrest or diminish it. Yet his corpulence did not interfere much with activity, even in advanced age. His motions were habitually rapid, and such as might have been expected in one who had been once so remarkably agile. He was characteristically quick in every movement, physical and intellectual. Neither did his corpulence interfere with his health. This was seldom interrupted. He was, indeed, occasionally troubled with some disorder of the stomach, somewhat similar to the modern fashionable disease called *dyspepsia*. He, however, very seldom took medicine; but generally found himself entirely relieved by a fast of twenty-four hours, to which he uniformly resorted.

Many other virtues besides those which have been mentioned, might be celebrated as shining in the character of this remarkable man. His perfect integrity; his freedom from all hidden policy or concealment; the disclosure of his sentiments on all subjects with the simplicity of a child; and his habitual disinterestedness, formed a charm of the most attractive kind in all his Christian and social intercourse.

To have had the opportunity of contributing any thing, however small, towards embalming the memory of this extraordinary man, I regard as one of the precious privileges of my life.

I am, Rev. and dear Sir,

Very sincerely yours,

SAMUEL MILLER.

JOHN DURBURROW BLAIR.*

1785—1823.

JOHN DURBURROW BLAIR was born at Fagg's Manor, Pa., October 15, 1759. He was a son of the Rev. John Blair, who was for a while settled in the neighbourhood of Carlisle, and afterwards succeeded his brother as both pastor of the church and teacher of the school, at Fagg's Manor. The subject of this sketch was graduated at the College of New Jersey in the year 1775, under the Presidency of Dr. Witherspoon. The Doctor, having been requested to name a suitable person to take charge of Washington Henry Academy in Virginia, which had been under the care of the Rev. Daniel McCalla, thought proper to recommend young Mr. Blair, who immediately repaired to Hanover, and entered on the duties of his office.

Mr. Blair had, early in life, made a profession of religion, and had formed a purpose to pursue the study of Theology. This purpose he continued to prosecute, without an instructor, after his removal to the South; and having passed through the prescribed trials in the Presbytery of Hanover, was licensed to preach the Gospel about the year 1785. Soon after this, he received a call from the Church in Pole Green, in Hanover, of which Samuel Davies had been pastor, while in Virginia; and, having accepted the call, was ordained to the pastoral office. He retained his connection with this church till within a few years of his death, when, by reason of the infirmities

* MS. from Rev. Dr. Archibald Alexander.

of age, he was no longer able to attend to his pastoral duties in connection with it. He was married to a Miss Winston, the daughter of a respectable gentleman in Hanover. The Academy not flourishing according to his wishes and expectations, he determined to remove his residence to the city of Richmond. Here he taught the classics to a number of boys in his own house, and preached on every alternate Sabbath in the Capitol, still giving the one half of his labours to the Church in Hanover, which was not more than nine or ten miles distant. His preaching in Richmond was in friendly association with the Rev. Dr. Buchanan, of the Episcopal Church. Between these two clergymen there subsisted a long and intimate friendship, which was terminated only by the decease of the latter. After the memorable calamity of the loss of so many valuable lives by the burning of the Richmond Theatre, in the year 1812, it was resolved by the inhabitants of Capitol Hill to build a Monumental Church on the site of the late Theatre. In this enterprise all the families, Presbyterian as well as Episcopalian, who had been accustomed to worship in the Capitol, enlisted, without, it would seem, any very definite understanding as to the ultimate destination of the edifice; though, after it was completed, it was thought best that it should be occupied exclusively by some one denomination, and the majority decided in favour of the Episcopalians. The friends of Mr. Blair, now animated by a more liberal and energetic spirit than ever before, proceeded to erect a handsome church edifice for themselves on Shockoe Hill, where he officiated during the remainder of his life. Before this time, the people had never been formed into a regular church: there were neither elders nor deacons, and the Lord's Supper had never been administered by Mr. Blair in Richmond; but such as were communicants were accustomed to go to the church in Hanover to join in the participation of that ordinance. As soon as their house was completed, a regular church was constituted, which still remains, and has been under the charge of several successive pastors since the death of Mr. Blair.

After he took up his residence in Richmond, he became intimate with the most enlightened men of the place, among whom were Judge Marshall and Judge Washington, who were remarkably fond of his company, and spent much of their leisure in a club of which he was an esteemed member.

His death came not suddenly, but gradually; and when he found his end approaching, he had his children called around his bed, and addressed them in the following manner:—"I have little to say to you,—much less than I expected, in consequence of weakness. In the contemplation of death, you are present to my mind. To part with you will be a painful scene. My manner of life, my doctrine, and the exhortations I have given you, you know. I have nothing new to add to these now. Your reliance for the pardon of your sins must be on the Lord Jesus Christ. To Him alone you must look. You must be sanctified. You were born in sin, as I was. This must be overcome; for nothing unholy can ever enter the Kingdom of Heaven. The grace of God alone is sufficient to sanctify you, to rectify the disorders which sin has introduced, and to implant in your hearts new principles, destroying the power and the love of sin. This grace is ever to be sought with humble, penitent, fervent hearts. In addition to this, and in consequence of this, you will find your highest delight in God, and your highest pleasure in his service. As for myself, I have reason to believe

that I was early made a subject of Divine grace. I have not been without my faults. My aberrations are chiefly in practical religion. When I was young, I was very enthusiastic; had the folly to think that if they would let me preach, I could convert the world. But God was pleased to show me my insufficiency. When I began to preach, I converted nobody. I could not do it. Yet I hope God has made me an instrument of good to many souls. When I came to maturer years, my religion became rather a calm and settled conviction and habit, than a matter of feeling and an ebullition of love. And now, after I am gone, if it is asked whether I made any remarkable speech, you may answer, No; but that I am not without hope and confidence. I depend on Him in whom I have believed. I think I have a right to plead his promises of mercy. He has never left me nor forsaken me. He has supported me all along, and I believe, will do so still. I know that I must pass through the dark valley and shadow of death; but I think I am prepared for God's will, and that I shall be ready when He shall call me home. 'Lord Jesus, into thy hands I commend my spirit!' I should like once more to speak to this congregation; but I shall not be able to do that." His death occurred in January, 1823; and his Funeral Sermon was preached by the Rev. John Blair Hoge, in the church on Shoekoe Hill, already mentioned.

Mr. Blair published a few occasional Sermons during his life, and after his death, a volume of his Sermons was published under the direction of his successor, the Rev. J. B. Hoge.

FROM MRS. DR. JOHN H. RICE.

NEAR HAMPTON SIDNEY COLLEGE, May 3, 1854.

My dear Sir: I knew the Rev. J. D. Blair slightly before I removed to Richmond to reside in 1812; but from that time my acquaintance with him was intimate as long as he lived, and my relations to him such as to give me a good opportunity of judging of his character. Many years have passed since his death; but my recollections of him are still fresh, and I cheerfully comply with your request in communicating them to you.

Mr. Blair was one of the most gentlemanly and polished men that you would meet in any circle. He was not above the medium height, and was of rather a slender figure; but had great delicacy of person, and an uncommonly mild and benignant, and at the same time an intellectual, expression of countenance. He was much more than clergymen generally are, a man of the world; was fond of polished and fashionable society, and mingled in it perhaps more freely than was consistent with his highest Christian enjoyment or ministerial usefulness. He was always particularly welcome to such circles, as his bland, engaging manners, and fine social qualities, were well fitted to render him a favourite. He never seemed more in his element than at a wedding. And this brings to my mind one peculiarity of his which I never knew how to account for: he was never willing to marry any one who had not been baptized, and sometimes, when he discovered at the moment when the ceremony was about to be performed, that the bride had not received baptism, he would abruptly pause, and proceed to administer it. He was very fond also of making the wedding of an elder daughter the occasion for baptizing the younger children of the family. He was accustomed to administer the ordinance generally, if not uniformly, in private, and the occasion (called a *Christening*) usually brought together many of the friends of the family, and was often attended with no inconsiderable degree of hilarity. It was both

his principle and practice to baptize all children, whether their parents were professors of religion or not.

Mr. Blair may be regarded as having been a more than commonly popular preacher. The staple of his sermons was good sense and sound orthodoxy, according to the standards of the Presbyterian Church. His style was graceful and polished, and his manner of delivery was in perfect harmony with his style. His voice was soft and pleasant, and fell like sweet music on the ear of his audience. My impression is that his ministrations were not remarkable for variety—certainly he had some favourite expressions which he repeated so often that I remember them to this day. For instance, when administering the Communion at Hanover, as he was accustomed to do, I have heard him say, I know not how often,—in addressing the coloured communicants, “Methinks your black faces will hereafter make a fine contrast with the white robes of Christ’s righteousness, which you will wear in Heaven.” Of course I do not hold myself responsible for the correctness of the sentiment, or the elegance of the expression—I only refer to it as a sentence which he often repeated.

Mr. Blair was always a benevolent man, but, in his latter days, he evidently grew in spirituality. I was not present at his dying scene, but was informed that it was characterized by great humility, peace, and confidence in the Saviour. His death produced no small sensation in the surrounding community; and all felt that a man of rare accomplishments and virtues had passed away.

Most respectfully,

ANNE S. RICE.

NATHAN GRIER.

1786—1814.

FROM THE REV. DAVID McCONAUGHY, D. D.,

PRESIDENT OF WASHINGTON COLLEGE.

WASHINGTON, Pa., June 25, 1849.

Rev. and dear Brother: The man whose memory you ask me to assist in embalming, is one to whose pious example, wise counsels and instructions, and earnest prayers, I was much indebted in my special preparation for the ministry. It will, therefore, be only a labour of love for me to comply with your request; and I am happy to say that my impressions of the venerable man are so distinct that I can state them without any doubt or misgiving as to their correctness. I have also in my possession the material facts necessary to a narrative of his life.

NATHAN GRIER was born in Bucks County, Pa., in September, 1760. His parents were John and Agnes (Caldwell) Grier, who, after their marriage, came to this country from Ireland. Without the wealth and distinction of this world, they were rich in faith and good works, and had that honour which cometh from God. By education, and by intelligent conviction, they embraced cordially and held firmly the faith and forms of the Presbyterian Church. They had three daughters and eight sons, who were highly esteemed for their intelligence, piety, and eminent worth. Their posterity, still numerous, honourably exemplify the virtues of their worthy ancestors.

The subject of this sketch “feared the Lord from his youth,” and was remarkable for his piety while yet a boy. Parental example, prayers, and