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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.

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BY WILLIAM B. SPRAGUE, D. D.

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VOLUME IV.
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JOHN MATTHEWS, D. D.*

1801—1848.

JOHN MATTHEWS was born in Guilford County, N. C., within the bounds of the Alamance Congregation, January 19, 1772. His father emigrated from Ireland, but was married after he came to this country—he was a farmer in moderate circumstances, but, from principle, never held slaves. The early advantages for education enjoyed by the son were very limited, though his tastes were, from childhood, decidedly intellectual. Having served for some time successively at the business of a wheelwright, a house carpenter, and a cabinet-maker,—always devoting to reading whatever leisure he could command from his daily employment,—he entered, at the age of about twenty, on a course of study in the school of the Rev. Dr. David Caldwell,—an eminent teacher, and the Pastor of the Church with which his father's family was connected. He lived part of the time in Dr. Caldwell's family, paying for his board by making various scientific instruments for the use of his school; and, during one of his vacations, he made a carriage for the Doctor, which the venerable old man used for many years afterwards to boast of, as he rode in it with his visitors, as a specimen of the handiwork of one of his pupils. During another vacation, he assisted in finishing a church edifice, especially in making the pulpit; and this structure was the first one he ever occupied, after he was licensed to preach. His progress in the languages was very rapid; but he seems to have had a still greater aptitude for the study of the sciences. He was especially delighted with Astronomy; and he even formed an Orrery, or Planetarium, showing the revolution of the heavenly bodies,—which was considered as an instrument of extraordinary power and accuracy. This also he presented to his revered teacher, in whose family it is understood that it is still preserved as a valuable relic.

Having completed his preparatory course, he was licensed to preach by the Presbytery of Orange in March, 1801, being then in his thirtieth year. The next winter, he was sent as a missionary to Natchez; and, in fulfilling this appointment, he had to traverse an extensive desolate region, where were not to be seen even the faintest traces of civilization. On his return to Carolina, he received a call, in April, 1803, from the Nutbush and Grassy Creek Churches. He accepted the call, and was installed shortly afterwards.

Mr. Matthews remained Pastor of these Churches until 1806, when he resigned his charge, and soon after was installed over the Church in Martinsburg, Va. After remaining here a little more than a year, he yielded to the urgent solicitation of the Church in Shepherdstown, Va., then vacant by the removal of Dr. Hoge to Hampden Sidney College,—to become their Pastor. He accepted this charge, not without many misgivings, particularly in consideration of the very high character of his predecessor; but the result proved that he was in no wise unworthy to succeed the man who had gone before him, though his praise had long been in all the churches. He preached as a stated supply to this Church and that of Charlestown till about 1826 or

* MSS. from his sons.—Foote's Sketches of N. C.—Dr. Wood's Fun. Serm. (MS.)

'27,—dividing his time equally between the two places, and preaching frequently also at Harper's Ferry. He then gave up his charge at Charlestown, and took that at Martinsburg in its place, dividing his time equally between Martinsburg and Charlestown till he removed to the West. Not only by the people of his immediate charge, but throughout the whole region, and indeed in the State at large, he was regarded as one of the ablest men, and one of the most useful and excellent preachers, of his day.

In 1823, he was honoured with the degree of Doctor of Divinity by the Trustees of Washington College, Pa.

In 1830, he was invited to become the Professor of Theology in the Theological Seminary which had then just been established at Hanover in Indiana. After visiting the place, and viewing the subject in all its bearings, he determined to accept the invitation; though, in doing so, he acted contrary to the judgment of most of his friends, and the earnest entreaties of some of them, and withal was fully convinced that the step must be adverse to his own pecuniary and worldly advantage. He recognised a call of Providence, and that with him was paramount to all other considerations. His inauguration as Professor took place on the 29th of June, 1831; and from that period till the close of his life,—seventeen years,—his devotion to the interests of the institution was most untiring and exemplary. He had no regular charge, as a preacher, during this period, but a large part of his Sabbaths were employed in supplying vacancies, or assisting his brethren in the neighbourhood. Though overtures were repeatedly made to him to occupy other important stations, he unhesitatingly declined them all, from a conviction that he held the place in which his labours were more effective for the promotion of the best interests of the Church than they would be likely to be in any other. During part of the time, he acted as Vice President of Hanover College, and often supplied vacancies in the College, in the way of instruction.

Dr. Matthews, a few years before his death, began to feel the infirmities of age, but he was able to labour, with little or no intermission, till almost the close of life; and at last he died suddenly. He had continued his lectures on Theology, till within a week of his death. He had been urged to submit to a surgical operation for an internal malady, and finally consented to it; but the operation proved fatal at the very moment of its being performed. He died at New Albany, on the 19th of May, 1848, in the seventy-seventh year of his age. His Funeral Sermon was preached by the Rev. Dr. James Wood, then one of the Professors in the Theological Seminary.

Dr. Matthews' two most important publications were entitled "Letters on the Divine Purpose," and "The influence of the Bible." These were published originally as communications in the Literary and Theological Magazine, edited by Dr. John H. Rice, and they subsequently took a more permanent form, and are justly regarded as having a high and enduring value. Beside these, he published the following:—National Peace and Safety: A Sermon preached on the Fast day appointed by public authority, 1812. Memorial of Independence: A Sermon delivered on the Fourth of July, 1815. A Sermon on Reconciliation by the Cross, published in the Virginia and North Carolina Preacher, 1818. The duties of the pastoral office: A Sermon preached at the ordination of Wells Andrews, 1818. On Intemperance, 1818. A Sermon at the Funeral of Colonel James Mor-

row. A Sermon preached before a Lodge of Freemasons. Ministerial devotedness: A Sermon delivered at the ordination and installation of Rev. James M. Brown, 1826. Inaugural Address upon occasion of his entering on the duties of Professor of Theology at Hanover, Ind., 1831. A Sermon on the Unity of Christ and the Church, published in a volume entitled "Original Sermons by Presbyterian ministers in the Mississippi Valley," 1833. A Biographical Sketch of the Rev. Harry Innis Todd.

Dr. Matthews was married on the 8th of December, 1803, to Elizabeth, daughter of John Daniel, of Charlotte County, Va. She died in June, 1809, leaving four young children. In April, 1818, he was married again to Elizabeth, daughter of James Wilson, of Berkley County; and by this marriage there were five children. His widow survives (1857) in her seventy-fourth year. All his sons,—six in number, are graduates of Colleges, and three of them are highly respectable ministers of the Presbyterian Church.

FROM THE REV. JAMES WOOD, D. D.

PROFESSOR IN THE NEW ALBANY THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY, IND.

NEW ALBANY, August 28, 1848.

My dear Sir: The venerable Dr. Matthews was not personally known to me till 1837. My first acquaintance with him was formed during a short visit at Hanover, Ind., where he then resided. The trait of character which produced the strongest impression on my mind at that time, was his unaffected and patriarchal simplicity. I found him, like Jacob, "a plain man," deliberate and somewhat reserved in conversation, yet so kind and hospitable that I felt the greatest freedom both in his society and in his house. Two years afterwards, I became associated with him as a Professor in the Theological Seminary, from which time I enjoyed almost daily intercourse with him till his death. My former impressions were fully sustained, and other traits, equally characteristic and praiseworthy, were developed, from time to time, as opportunities occurred for their exhibition.

Dr. Matthews possessed talents of a high order. His reasoning powers were acute. His method was easy, perspicuous and logical. He uttered his thoughts with so much accuracy and precision, that he seldom recalled a word, or had any occasion to change it for another. In the commencement of his ministry, he is said to have exhibited great fervour and occasional vehemence, which produced, at times, a very strong and visible effect upon his audience. This method of speaking he afterwards exchanged for one more composed and deliberate, and he evidently aimed rather at instructing than exciting his hearers. But though deliberate, he was not dull. Though he made no attempt at oratory, either by gestures or ornate diction, his language and manner were generally impressive, and sometimes truly eloquent. He was a close student, and an accurate scholar; was uncommonly familiar with the classics, and critically acquainted with the original of the New Testament.

In the earlier part of his ministry, he was a frequent contributor to the Literary and Evangelical Magazine, and his productions were so highly prized that some of them were republished in a separate form. For many years before his decease, he had a trembling in his hands, which disabled him, in a great measure, for committing his thoughts to paper. This accounts for his having written so little for the press, during the last twenty-five years of his life. But his "Letters on the Divine Purpose" are of themselves sufficient to entitle him to a place among our best theological writers. His lectures to the students, for the reason just given, were not written out; and are therefore preserved only in his own

brief notes, and the notes taken by those who enjoyed the privilege of hearing them delivered. He was a thorough Theologian and an able Professor; and I doubt not that those who knew him best, would fully sustain the remark that he would have honoured the chair of Professor of Theology in any Seminary in our country.

I have already alluded to the fact that Dr. Matthews was distinguished for his simplicity of character. This was visible both in public and in private; in the pulpit and in the lecture room. It applies to both his language and his feelings, to his manner and his thoughts. He always believed what he said, and spoke what he meant.

He was not less distinguished for consistency. His mind was well balanced, his judgment sound, and his conduct uniformly correct and well ordered. His piety was not fluctuating,—now elevated and again low,—here joyful and there melancholy;—it was as serene as the morning, and as constant and regular in its exercise as the return of day.

He was also a pattern of meekness. Whether he was naturally amiable or otherwise I do not know; but during his *Christian* course, the life of God in his soul shone forth in an unusual degree, in the exhibition of that holy and quiet spirit, which is patient under suffering, meek under injuries, and submissive under the vexations and disappointments incident to our earthly condition.

He was a discreet man. He never spoke nor acted rashly, but always with suitable caution and a due regard to the circumstances of the case. He was pacific and kind. He neither kindled the flame of discord, nor fanned and kept it alive, after it had been kindled by others. He studiously avoided doing harm, and was ever ready to aid in doing good.

He was eminently conscientious. The duties which he regarded as belonging to himself he seldom, without special necessity, discharged by proxy. He considered his responsibility as personal as well as official; and if able, he fulfilled his engagements with uniformity and promptness. Occasionally, in the public weekly exercises of the Seminary, the student whose turn it was to officiate performed his part in the person of another; the former agreeing to take the place of the latter at some future time. This arrangement never escaped the notice of Dr. Matthews, who often made a remark to this effect,—that what was John's duty did not belong at the same time to Peter or James; and unless the first was prevented by sickness, it was not suitable for either of the latter to take his place.

He was punctual to perform his duties at the precise time appointed. In several instances, in order to promote the same habit in the student, he gave to one of them "Punctuality" as the thème of an essay. When, as it sometimes happened, his watch was too slow, and he was, in consequence of this, behind the appointed hour in arriving at the Seminary, he would reply, on being reminded of the time,—“My watch is not a moral agent.”

He was very reluctant to express an opinion as to the degree of a man's piety. If a person gave what he deemed to be scriptural evidence of being pious, he would speak of him as a pious man. But whether this man was more or less of a saint than that, he was unwilling to decide. Accordingly, in making our Quarterly Reports to the Board of Education, he never would consent to graduate the piety of the students, according to the scale furnished us by the Board. On one occasion, he remarked that the attempt to graduate their piety according to a mathematical scale, appeared to him as incongruous as to estimate music by the pound.

He seldom referred to his own religious experience either in preaching or conversation. What his feelings were could be easily inferred; yet he rarely spoke of himself. His preaching was highly spiritual. No one could listen to it without being impressed with the belief that his knowledge of Divine truth was

experimental. His conversation was, in like manner, seasoned with grace, and indicated a heart deeply and habitually imbued with the Spirit of Christ. The week before his death, I conversed with him concerning Solomon's description of old age, when he observed,—“That description suits my case; the machine is nearly run down;” but added in substance—I do not remember his precise language—that in the Heavenly state our disordered and decayed bodies will undergo a complete repair, and never become old again through eternity.

I am very respectfully yours,

JAMES WOOD.

FROM THE REV. JAMES M. BROWN, D.D.

KANAWHA COURT HOUSE, Va., February 18, 1857.

Rev. and dear Sir: I first became acquainted with Dr. Matthews in the autumn of 1824,—a few months after my licensure. He seemed to be past the prime of life physically, and in its very prime mentally. He was my nearest clerical neighbour, and, to my very great comfort and advantage, an intimacy commenced between us as close as can well exist where there is such disparity in age, and continued till he removed to South Hanover.

He had been settled in Shepherdstown more than twenty years. I have never known a minister of the Gospel who was more beloved and respected by all classes than he was. This was the result of perfect frankness, integrity, and gentleness, in his deportment. No man ever suspected him of double dealing. I believe he never had any thing approaching a personal difficulty, either as a man or a pastor, during his long residence in that part of Virginia. This was owing, in no small degree, to the full conviction entertained by all that, whatever opinions he might avow, or whatever course he might pursue, in any case, he was perfectly honest in it. Hence his pastoral life was peculiarly happy. And then he possessed a native kindness that led him to sympathize most tenderly with those who were under trials or in affliction. He was a welcome visitor at the house of mourning; and many still live who remember how he soothed their sorrows in the dark days of their trouble. A more affectionate husband, father, and friend, few have ever seen.

The first evening that I spent in his company I formed a very high opinion of his Biblical knowledge; and this was abundantly confirmed by the intercourse of following years. It seemed to me that there was not a verse in the Bible that he had not investigated, so as to form a matured opinion in regard to it. I thought him better qualified to prepare what has long been needed,—a plain Commentary for common people, than any minister in the Synod of Virginia. The effect of his familiarity with the Bible was very manifest in his preaching. There was a fulness of Bible thoughts, and a pertinency in Bible illustrations that furnished rich spiritual food in all his pulpit performances.

Another thing that marked very strikingly his sermons, and all the productions of his pen, was the power that he possessed of fixing his mind on any subject, or on any subordinate part of a general subject, and following it out in all its bearings and connections. From this came a clearness and simpleness in his sermons, that formed one of their prominent characteristics. The child understood, the man was interested, and many were unaware of the high order of mental power that was exhibited in what seemed so very plain. He sometimes wrote his sermons, but never committed them,—never used his manuscript in the pulpit; and still what he delivered was so exactly what he had written, that not one in ten would be able to detect any difference. This, I know, was the case with the sermon which he preached at my ordination, and which was afterwards printed.

Earnestness was the prominent trait of his delivery. His voice was pleasant, his enunciation distinct and deliberate. He seemed to shun every thing like flights of fancy; and still there was more than a little of true eloquence, and that of a high order, coming from clear views of the character of God, and the riches of his grace in the provisions of the Gospel. I have never heard more pungent appeals to the unconverted, nor the fulness of the consolations of the Gospel more clearly presented to the child of God, than by him.

Much beloved by his brethren in the ministry, there was a strong feeling of regret that they had to part with him, when he was elected Professor of Theology at South Hanover; but, at the same time, a full conviction that he was eminently qualified for the work. He deserved all the veneration and love which he received from both the Church and the world.

Dr. Matthews was a working man, as a pastor, and as a member of Presbytery. Punctual in his attendance on its meetings, he was always familiar with its business, and one of the very foremost in carrying on its Educational and Missionary operations. When the Winchester Presbytery endowed a scholarship in Union Seminary, he collected one third of the funds for that purpose. We all loved him. We loved to take counsel from him; we loved to work with him; and sadly did we miss him when he met with us no more.

Yours in the Gospel,

JAMES M. BROWN.

FROM THE REV. SAMUEL B. WILSON, D. D.

UNION THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY, (Va.,) }
February 20, 1857.

Dear Sir: My acquaintance with the late venerable Dr. Matthews commenced on his removal into this State, which was about the year 1807 or 1808. We belonged to the same Presbytery, and often met in the judicatories of the Church, and on other occasions, and corresponded on various subjects, until his removal to Indiana.

From his first connection with the Synod of Virginia, till his removal to the West, he was highly esteemed by his brethren and by the churches, as a sound divine, and a most zealous and acceptable preacher. To have been selected as successor to such a man as Dr. Hoge, was sufficient evidence of this. The members of that church were the descendants of that noble race of men who emigrated from Europe to escape from persecution, and sought, amidst the toils and perils of the wilderness, to secure their civil and religious rights. They had been carefully instructed in the doctrines of Christianity, and highly prized the faith, and the excellent customs, of their fathers. To be the dispenser of the word and ordinances to them, Dr. Matthews was chosen with great unanimity.

In person, Dr. Matthews was tall and spare, rather than fleshy. He was an example of temperance in eating and drinking. In his manner, he was grave and dignified, but not morose or assuming. His feelings and his uniform deportment were such as comported well with his sacred office and responsible duties. In his public acts, and in his private intercourse with men, few, it is believed, ever more closely obeyed the injunction of the Apostle,—“Give none offence, neither to the Jews, nor to the Gentiles, nor to the Church of God.” A charming spirit of brotherly love and charity seemed to be, in him, a ruling principle.

Dr. Matthews' efforts in the pulpit manifested careful preparation, a clear apprehension of Divine truth, and a heartfelt sense of its importance. On special occasions, his sermons were fully written, but he was not accustomed to read them. While every intelligent hearer could readily perceive the evidences of a strong mind and careful investigation, no indication could be detected of a desire to display either his talents or his learning. Of him, as truly as of any

man I ever knew, it could be said, he did not preach himself, but "Jesus Christ and Him crucified."

While the general character of his preaching might be denominated expository, or argumentative, yet, on some occasions, his discourses were pathetic and exciting in a high degree. But these emotions in his audience were not produced by any studied art of the speaker, but by truth presented clearly by one that felt deeply its infinite importance, and was anxious for the salvation of those he addressed.

In the judicatories of the Church, he was a wise counsellor. Great confidence was placed by all his brethren in his sound judgment. And his humility, modesty, fraternal affection, and love of peace, made him a universal favourite.

Dr. Matthews was a clear, vigorous and impressive writer, and some of his productions have been received with great favour by the religious public, and have passed through several editions. But his laborious pastoral duties, and the care of a numerous family, to be provided for and educated on a very limited salary, render it wonderful that he found time to write as much as he did.

Such was the character and reputation of this good man, and godly minister, while he resided in Virginia. In the large circle where he was well known, both in the churches and among his brethren in the ministry, it is believed there is not one who does not cherish his memory with high respect and sincere affection.

Very truly yours,

SAMUEL B. WILSON.

FROM THE REV. WILLIAM C. MATTHEWS, D. D.

SHELBYVILLE, Ky., January 14, 1857.

Rev. and dear Sir: I am quite aware how delicate a task it is that you have assigned to me, to speak of my own beloved and revered father; and yet I am unwilling to decline your request, especially as there are certain aspects of his character which I love most to contemplate, with which I had perhaps a better opportunity to become acquainted than those whose relations with him were less intimate and endearing. I will state a few of my recollections of him somewhat at random, and shall be glad if you find them in any degree to subserve your purpose.

I think I hazard nothing in saying that he was a perfect gentleman both in heart and in manner. Naturally of an excitable temperament, he had learned the art of complete control over both his feelings and his tongue. I never heard him speak an unkind word of any one—he always apologized for the faults of others, where they would admit of an apology, and never betrayed the semblance of bad feeling even towards the most bitter opponents. As a father, he was mild and affectionate but firm; though, in later years, he became so much engrossed with professional cares that he devolved the management of his family in a great degree upon his wife. His intercourse with his brethren was always marked with the utmost urbanity and kindness. Though he never indulged in light and frivolous conversation, but always maintained the dignity of his profession, he had a keen relish for the society of his friends, and scrupled not occasionally to enliven the intercourse with a little innocent hilarity. He always seemed to feel that his brethren were entitled to a higher place than himself; and he was more than willing to concede it.

He was not, especially in later years, much inclined to speak in Presbytery, or Synod, or any Public Body—indeed he scarcely ever spoke, unless in some case of great urgency, or where he was particularly requested to do so. While a member of the Presbytery of Madison, Ind., two ministers of that Body had become zealous abolitionists, and offered a series of resolutions, denouncing the slaveholder as of course unworthy of Church fellowship, &c. Some of the

younger members, knowing my father's views upon the whole subject, desired him to reply to a somewhat intemperate speech which one of these brethren had made; and he arose with apparent diffidence, and, after apologizing for interrupting the discussion, remarked—"As we have no slaveholders here to deal with, I think our time might be better spent, if we should attempt something practical and beneficial to the poor slave. I therefore propose that we constitute ourselves into a practical Emancipation Society, and each member pledge himself to give five dollars towards the purchase of some slave who desires to migrate to Liberia." This was met with a hearty response by a majority of the Presbytery, but it greatly shocked and offended the brethren who had originated the discussion. He was thoroughly opposed to slavery in his views and feelings. Out of his own scanty means he purchased all the slaves belonging to his wife's estate, sold at the death of her mother, and held them until he left for the West. Then he sent his son in Virginia the money to purchase the husband of his woman at a high price, and sent them all, except one superannuated female, to Liberia, where he frequently had the pleasure to hear from them as in a comfortable and prosperous state.

He had a most happy talent at administering reproof. While at Hanover, as he was passing by one of the students of the College who was cutting wood, the student, not knowing that he was near, and being vexed about something, uttered a profane oath. My father, as he approached him, said very kindly,—“That is good exercise that you are taking this cold morning.” He asked him if his axe was dull; and taking hold as if to examine it, he commenced chopping the stick of wood, greatly to the amusement of the young man, and kept at it until it was cut in two. Then turning to the student, he said,—“See there now, I have cut that stick without fretting or swearing, and why could not you have done the same?” The young man apologized for his profaneness, saying, “I did not know that you were near, Sir—if I had known it, I should not have uttered that oath.” “Yes, but God is always near, and hears every word you say,—you ought to remember that”—was the answer. The reproof took effect in the mind of the youth, and led to the most serious reflections.

As a preacher, I shall leave it chiefly to others to speak of him, though I cannot forbear to mention one anecdote illustrative of the prominence which he always gave to the great doctrine of a crucified Saviour. Many years ago, a young clergyman of another denomination was preaching in his pulpit in Shepherdstown, in a manner that evinced perhaps more zeal than knowledge, and setting forth the terrors of the law in a way better fitted to provoke than to impress or alarm his hearers. At length, after having thus harangued his audience for an hour, he concluded by saying,—“My hearers, if these things do not move you, nothing can—if the terrors of the Almighty will not arouse you, there is no hope for you;” and then sat down. My father, who had been sitting just beneath the pulpit, immediately arose, and remarked in his quiet and subdued tone,—“Yes, thank God, there is another consideration that ought deeply to affect our hearts—it is the love of Christ for guilty sinners;” and then dwelt upon this thought in the most simple and affectionate manner, until the whole congregation were melted to tears. The young minister felt himself reprovcd, and the change in the feelings of the congregation was very manifest. My father seldom preached much of what is commonly called *terror*; and when he did, the compassion and tenderness that breathed in his manner gave it the greater effect.

I might greatly extend these recollections, but I prefer that, in respect to his public character particularly, you should have the testimony or the judgment of others, who can speak with greater impartiality than myself.

I remain, my dear Sir,

Very truly yours,

W. C. MATTHEWS.