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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.

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JOHN McMILLAN, D. D.

1774—1833.

FROM THE REV. JAMES CARNAHAN, D. D., LL. D.

PRINCETON, November 16, 1847.

Rev. and dear Sir: In reply to your letter requesting me to give you some account of the character and ministry of the late Rev. JOHN McMILLAN, D. D., I am happy to inform you that, a few years before the death of that remarkable man,—wishing to know something of his early life, and the progress of religion in Western Pennsylvania, as identified with his labours, I requested him to furnish me with a statement on these subjects. To my request he replied in the accompanying letter, which is at your service. You will see that this letter contains a fuller and more correct account of the introduction and establishment of Presbyterianism, and I may add of Christianity, in Western Pennsylvania, than can be found elsewhere. Presbyterians were the pioneers of that country. Within my recollection, there was hardly a congregation of any other denomination of Christians to be found West of the mountains. The letter I regard as a precious relic, not only on account of the facts which it contains, but as a remarkable specimen of penmanship. It was written when he was eighty years old, on three sides of half a sheet of small foolscap paper, and yet every word is legible, and nearly every letter complete.

DR. McMILLAN'S LETTER.

CHARTIERS, March 26, 1832.

REV. DR. CARNAHAN—Dear Sir: I received your friendly letter, and will endeavour to comply with your request.

I was born in Fagg's Manor, Chester County, Pa., November 11, 1752. I was first sent to a grammar school, kept by the Rev. John Blair, where I continued until he was removed to Princeton to superintend the College there. I was then sent to Pequea, to a grammar school kept by the Rev. Robert Smith. While there, the Lord poured out his Spirit upon the students, and I believe there were but few who were not brought under serious concern about their immortal souls; some of whom became blessings in their day, and were eminently useful in the Church of Christ; but they are all now gone to rest. It was here that I received my first religious impressions; though, as long as I can remember, I had at times some checks of conscience, and some alarms about the state of my soul: but these seasons were of short continuance;—like the early cloud and the morning dew, they quickly passed away. I never saw that I was a lost, undone sinner, exposed to the wrath of a justly offended God, and could do nothing for my own relief. My convictions were not attended with much horror: though I felt that I deserved hell, and that in all probability *that* must be my portion, yet I could not feel that distress which I ought to feel, and which I thought I must feel, before I could expect to obtain relief. I felt also much legality mingled with all the duties which I attempted to perform. In this situation I continued until I entered College at Princeton, in the spring of 1770. I had not been long there, until a revival of

religion took place among the students, and I believe, at one time, there were not more than two or three but what were under serious impressions. On a day which had been set apart by a number of the students, to be observed as a day of fasting and prayer,—while the others were at dinner, I retired into my study, and while trying to pray, I got some discoveries of Divine things, which I had never had before. I saw that the Divine law was not only holy, just and spiritual, but that it was good also, and that conformity to it would make me happy. I felt no disposition to quarrel with the law, but with myself, because I was not conformed to it. I felt that it was now easy to submit to the Gospel plan of salvation, and felt a serenity of mind to which I had hitherto been a stranger. And it was followed by a delight in contemplating God's glorious perfections in all his works. I thought I could see God in every thing around me.

I continued at College until the fall of 1772, when I returned to Pequea, and began the study of Theology, under the direction of the Rev. Robert Smith, D. D. I had great difficulties in my own mind about undertaking the work of the Gospel ministry. I at last came to this determination,—to leave the matter wholly with God: if He opened the way, I would go on; if He shut it, I would be satisfied; and I think, if I ever knew what it was to have no will of my own about any matter, it was about this. I passed through my trials in the Presbytery of Newcastle, and was licensed by them to preach the Gospel, October 26, 1774, at East Nottingham.

The first winter after being licensed, I spent in itinerating in the vacant congregations of Newcastle and Donegal Presbyteries. In the summer of 1775, I took a tour through the settlements of Virginia, between the North and South mountains. In July, I crossed the mountains between Staunton and the head of Tyart's Valley, preached in the various settlements through which I passed, until I came to Chartiers, preached on the fourth Sabbath of August, and on the Tuesday following, at Pigeon Creek. I then turned my course eastward, and preached in the different settlements, as I passed along. In the winter, I again visited Augusta County, in Virginia, crossed the mountains in January, and preached at Pigeon Creek and Chartiers, until the latter end of March, 1776, when I returned home; and, at a meeting of Presbytery, on the 23d of April, accepted a call from the united Congregations of Chartiers and Pigeon Creek, and was dismissed to join the Presbytery of Donegal, and on the 19th of June, was ordained at Chambersburg. It being in the time of the Revolutionary war, and the Indians being very troublesome on the frontiers, I was prevented from removing my family to my congregations until November, 1778. I, however, visited them as often as I could, ordained elders, baptized their children, and took as much care of them as circumstances would permit.

When I came to this country, the cabin in which I was to live was raised, but there was no roof on it, nor chimney nor floor in it: the people, however, were very kind, assisted me in preparing my house, and on the 16th of December, I moved into it: but we had neither bedstead, nor table, nor chairs, nor stool, nor bucket. All these things we had to leave behind us: there being no waggon road at that time over the mountains, we could bring nothing with us but what was carried on pack horses. We placed two boxes on each other, which served us for a table, and two kegs served for seats; and having committed ourselves to God in family worship, we spread a bed on the floor, and slept soundly till morning. The next day, a neighbour coming

to my assistance, we made a table and a stool, and in a little time had every thing comfortable about us. Sometimes, indeed, we had no bread for weeks together; but we had plenty of pumpkins, and potatoes, and all the necessaries of life; and as for luxuries, we were not much concerned about them. We enjoyed health, the Gospel and its ordinances, and pious friends: we were in the place where we believed God would have us to be, and we did not doubt but that He would provide for us every thing necessary. My wife and I lived comfortably together more than forty-three years; and on the 24th of November, 1819, she departed triumphantly to take possession of her house not made with hands, eternal in the Heavens.

When I had determined to come to this country, Dr. Smith enjoined it upon me to look out for some pious young men, and educate them for the ministry; "for," said he, "though some men of piety and talents may go to a new country, at first, yet if they are not careful to raise up others, the country will not be well supplied." Accordingly, I collected a few who gave evidence of piety, and taught them the Latin and Greek languages, some of whom became useful, and others eminent, ministers of the Gospel. I had still a few with me, when the Academy was opened in Cannonsburg, and finding that I could not teach, and do justice to my congregation, I immediately gave it up, and sent them there.

The first remarkable season of the outpouring of the Spirit, which we enjoyed in this congregation, began about the middle of December, 1781. It made its first appearance among a few who met together for social worship, on the evening of a Thanksgiving day, which had been appointed by Congress. This encouraged us to appoint other meetings for the same purpose on Sabbath evenings; and the appearances still increasing, Sabbath night societies were continued with but little interruption for nearly two years. It was then usual to spend the whole night in religious exercises; nor did the time seem tedious, for the Lord was there, and his work went pleasantly on. Many were pricked to the heart with deep convictions, and a goodly number, we hope, became the subjects of renewing grace. At the first sacramental occasion after the work began, forty-five were added to the church, many of whom continued bringing forth the fruits of righteousness, and filling important offices in the church, until they were removed to the world of spirits. This time of refreshing continued, in a greater or less degree, until the year 1794. Upon every sacramental occasion, during this period, numbers were added to the church, who gave comfortable evidence of having obtained a saving change of heart; but, as I neglected to keep a register of their names, I cannot now ascertain their number.

The next remarkable season of the outpouring of God's Spirit was in the year 1795. This, however, was not very extensive, nor of long continuance; yet, during this season, about fifty were added to the church, most of whom continued to manifest, by their walk and conversation, that they had experienced a real change of heart, and some of them became successful preachers of the Gospel, though there were some lamentable instances of apostacy.

In the spring of the year 1799, the Lord again graciously revived his work in this congregation. Many were at once awakened to a serious concern about their immortal souls, and made to inquire the way to Zion with their faces thitherward, weeping as they went. Of those that were then awakened, about sixty joined the church, and made a public profession of

religion. This revival, as well as that of '95, was carried on without much external appearance, except a solemn attention and silent weeping under the preaching of the word.

From this time until the fall of 1802, religion was evidently on the decline; for though some were every year added to the church, yet they were generally such as had been brought under serious impressions in 1799, and there were few or none newly awakened. Sinners became more bold in sin, and floods of vanity and carnality appeared likely to carry all before them. Even the pious themselves became very weak and feeble in the cause of Christ, and much buried in the world, insomuch that when God returned to build up Zion, it might in truth be said, "We were as men that dream." Many stood astonished, not knowing what to make of it, and but few were prepared to meet the Lord, and bid Him welcome. This work differed from former revivals only in this,—that the body was more generally affected. It was no unusual thing to see persons so entirely deprived of bodily strength, that they would fall from their seats and off their feet, and be as unable to help themselves as a new born child. I have seen some lie in this condition for hours, who yet said that they could hear every thing that was spoken, and felt their minds more composed, and more capable of attending to Divine things, than when their bodies were not thus affected. As far as I could observe, the bodily exercise never preceded but always followed upon the mind's being deeply impressed with a sense of some Divine truth. Between fifty and sixty joined the church, as the fruits of this revival. After the close of the revival, which began in 1809,—though, upon every sacramental occasion, some joined the church,—yet nothing very remarkable took place until 1823, when God again visited this dry and parched congregation with a shower of Divine influences. About sixty joined the church, as the fruits of this revival; a number of whom were students in the College, and are now preaching the Gospel of Christ to their dying fellow men. Since that time, religion has rather been on the decline, though still we are not left without some tokens of the Divine presence. At every sacramental occasion, some have come out from the world, and professed to take the Lord for their portion. * * * *

The First Presbytery that met on this side of the mountains, was held at Mount Pleasant, on the third week of October, 1783. The first Synod met at Pittsburg, on the last Wednesday of September, 1802. * * * I am now in my eightieth year, and have outlived all the first set of ministers who settled on this side of the mountains, all the second set who were raised in this country, and several of the third. I yet enjoy pretty good health, though sometimes troubled with rheumatic pains. I am yet able to preach, though my memory is much failed, so that I am obliged to make more use of notes than formerly; yet my lungs are still good, and I can bawl almost as loud as ever. * * * As I have given up my congregation, because I could no longer perform the duties of a pastor, if my life and health be continued, I design this spring and summer to visit some of the old congregations which I helped to collect, and see how they do, and once more blow the Gospel trumpet among them. JOHN McMILLAN.

The preceding letter nearly exhausts the subject of your inquiry, as it was written when the venerable old man had almost reached the end of his course. He received the degree of Doctor of Divinity from Jefferson Col-

lege, in 1807. During the summer and autumn immediately preceding his death, he was occupied much in visiting the churches, and preaching in various places, and it was observed that he preached with almost the energy of middle life. In October, 1833, he attended the meeting of the Synod at Pittsburg, and preached twice during its sessions; and afterwards accompanied several of his brethren down the river to Wheeling. There he remained nearly a fortnight, preaching almost every day and evening. On Tuesday, the 5th of November, he went to Cannonsburg, and stopped at the house of a friend, in his usual health. In the course of the night following, he was taken seriously ill, and when the Doctor was called the next morning, Dr. M. made a remark to him, that was understood to imply a conviction on his part that his disease would have a fatal termination. And thus it actually resulted. He died, sustained to the last by the consolations of the Gospel, on Saturday morning, the 16th of November. His disease was paralysis of the prostrate gland, occasioned, as was supposed, by overtasking his strength in preaching. The day after his death, which was the Sabbath, his body was conveyed to the Chartiers Church, attended by a large concourse, where, after appropriate funeral services, it was laid in its last resting place.

In his personal appearance and manners, Dr. McMillan was as far from being attractive as you can well imagine. He was nearly or quite six feet high, when standing erect,—which, however, rarely happened, as he usually walked with his neck and head inclined forward. He was of a stout and clumsy form, his features coarse, his nose very prominent, and his general aspect somewhat forbidding.

He had, I think, no great talent at extemporaneous preaching,—at least in early life. He, therefore, wrote his sermons out in full, and committed them to memory. As he could put *multum in parvo* on paper, he had his sermon of such a size that he could put it into a small pocket Bible, and hold it under his thumb, so that very few of his hearers knew, or even suspected, that he had so much as short notes. His voice was strong and coarse, and he poured his words out in such a torrent, that it often offended delicate ears. He had but little gesture, seldom moving his hands in the pulpit. The body of his discourse was generally doctrinal, divided into two or three heads,—the whole an hour long,—not five minutes more or less,—embracing, at different times, the whole system of doctrine taught in our Confession of Faith. In the application of his sermons, which he never omitted, he made appeals to the hearts and consciences of his hearers, which were sometimes appalling. In describing the wretchedness of the lost, especially of those who had enjoyed the privileges of the Gospel, he was tremendous. And God blessed his preaching in a remarkable manner. He could not be called a man of genius, or of splendid talents. He wrote and spoke plain English, which the most illiterate could understand, and seldom introduced metaphysical discussion, either in the pulpit or out of it. I have often seen him, when preaching to fifteen hundred or two thousand people, in the open air, under the shade of the native trees, take off his coat and neckcloth or stock, in the midst of his discourse, and proceed without exciting a smile in one of the audience.

He was an excellent Latin and Greek scholar, and, at a very early period, opened a school in a small log cabin which he built near his house. Whenever he found a young man of piety, who appeared to have gifts promising

extensive usefulness in the Church, he took him into his family, taught him without charge, and trained him up for the ministry. In this way Patterson, Porter, Marques, Hughes, and several other eminently useful ministers, were trained. After an Academy, through his influence, was established in Cannonsburg, three miles from his residence, he confined his teaching to Theology; and this he continued until Theological Seminaries were established.

He lived almost entirely on the products of his farm, and in a style of the utmost simplicity and plainness; and though he extended a hospitable welcome to his friends, they generally partook of the accustomed fare, and never heard an apology from his lips. No man ever valued money less, for his own use or that of his family, beyond what was necessary to render them comfortable. I have reason to believe that, in the latter part of his life, he gave, for benevolent purposes, more than he received from his congregation; and he did it so silently, that there were very few to whom it was known. He was in the habit of furnishing indigent young men with the means of prosecuting their studies for the Gospel ministry,—always as a loan,—telling them to return it when they were able, so that he might assist others. He also enlisted the co-operation of others with himself in this object, long before Education Societies were thought of. From a person who lived in his family, at the time of the occurrence, I learned the following interesting fact illustrative of his benevolence. Sometime between 1780 and 1790, there was a scarcity of bread, and great suffering in consequence, in the Western part of Pennsylvania. The scarcity of breadstuffs was not thought of until April or May; but, about that time, people began to go in every direction to purchase grain. When a stranger came to Mr. McMillan, wishing to buy, he would ask the applicant in a rough way if he had money to pay for it. On receiving an answer in the affirmative, he would say,—“I have no wheat or corn for *you*; you can buy elsewhere.” He disposed of his wheat and corn, of which he had several hundred bushels, to such as he knew had no means to buy, on condition that they would return to him an equal quantity after harvest. To the vicious and idle his rebukes were often severe, sometimes scathing. To those in distress either of body or mind, he was kind and tender, beyond what a stranger would think possible in a man of his appearance.

Dr. McMillan's influence in preaching the Gospel himself, and in training others for the same work, it is not easy to estimate. With all his imperfections, he was just such a man as was suited to the field of labour assigned him. He lived to a good old age, and has left behind him a bright name on earth, and has gone, I doubt not, to a glorious reward in Heaven.

Very respectfully and truly yours,

JAMES CARNAHAN.