

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.

---

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.

## SAMUEL BLAIR, D. D.

1764—1818.

FROM THE REV. WILLIAM NEILL, D. D.

PHILADELPHIA, January 15, 1849.

My dear Brother: Agreeably to your request, I send you the following brief notice of the late Dr. Blair. I was not intimately acquainted with him; but having resided in Germantown, and preached some years in the house of worship which he very generously aided in erecting, I had an opportunity of learning his character and manner of life from reliable sources.

SAMUEL BLAIR was born in Fagg's Manor, Chester County, Pa., in the year 1741. His father, the Rev. Samuel Blair, then Pastor of the Church in that place, was a Presbyterian minister, of respectable talents and eminent usefulness; was a zealous friend to Whitefield, and ranked high among the New Lights in the memorable schism of the old New York and Philadelphia Synod. The son, as may be supposed from the character of the father, was early and carefully trained in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. When he was about ten years of age, his father was removed by death, and the care of his education devolved on his widowed mother and her advisers. The trust seems to have been faithfully discharged; for Samuel, in due time, entered the College of New Jersey, where he was graduated with honour, in 1760, at the age of nineteen. He afterwards served as Tutor there for about three years—from 1761 to 1764.

I can find no account of his first religious impressions; but the presumption is that he was hopefully pious before he entered College. The Christian ministry was his object; and, after passing the usual trials with credit, he was licensed to preach the Gospel, by the Presbytery of Newcastle, in 1764. He was popular as a preacher from his first appearance in the pulpit. His discourses were written out in full, with great care, and his elocution was at once chaste and impressive. Indeed, he seems to have been a young man of fine talents, and more than ordinary acquirements for his age. In proof of the justice of this remark, it may be stated here, that, in 1767, after Dr. Witherspoon had declined the first call of the Trustees of the College of New Jersey to the Presidency of that institution, young Blair, though not over twenty-six years of age, was elected to that office, with, as we have reason to believe, entire unanimity. But when the intelligence came from Scotland that, owing to a change of circumstances, Dr. Witherspoon would probably accept the call if it should be renewed, Mr. Blair immediately declined the invitation, and Dr. W. was re-elected. This was regarded, at the time, as a remarkable instance of self-sacrifice to the public good. He felt that the interests of the College demanded the services of a man of matured mind and eminent qualifications; and, therefore, gave way with a modesty and magnanimity worthy of record.

In November, 1766, Mr. Blair was installed pastor of the Old South Church in Boston, as a colleague of the Rev. Dr. Sewall. On his way thither, after his acceptance of the call, he was shipwrecked in the night, losing his wardrobe and manuscripts, and escaping narrowly with his life

His exposure, on this occasion, injured his health, and the loss of his sermons, which he had written with great care, depressed his spirits. In the spring of 1769, he took a journey to Philadelphia, and while there had a severe illness, which it was thought had given a shock to his constitution from which it could never recover. This, in connection with certain difficulties which had sprung up between him and his people, in relation to the Half-way Covenant,—as it was called, induced him, in September following, to proffer the resignation of his charge; and he was accordingly dismissed, October 10, 1769. About this time, he was married to Susan, daughter of the elder William Shippen, M. D.,—an eminent physician of Philadelphia. They had five children,—two sons and three daughters.

He received the degree of Doctor of Divinity from the University of Pennsylvania, in 1790.

After resigning his charge at Boston, he took up his residence at Germantown, near Philadelphia, where he passed the remainder of his life in retirement and devotion to his books; except that he served two years as Chaplain in Congress, and preached at other times, occasionally, as opportunity offered. He died in September, 1818, in the seventy-seventh year of his age. Mrs. Blair died in the spring of 1821.

Dr. Blair published two Sermons, one of which was occasioned by the death of the Rev. Dr. John Blair Smith, Philadelphia, 1799.

Dr. Blair was of about the medium size, of fair and ruddy complexion, and decidedly a fine looking man—not unlike, in his personal appearance, to the late Dr. Samuel Stanhope Smith. He was a man of polished manners and of amiable and generous dispositions. He was also a superior scholar, a well read theologian, and an eloquent pulpit orator. But, owing perhaps to excessive diffidence, and a tendency to melancholy, he was too much of a recluse. True, his health was feeble; but it would probably have been improved by more active service. He yielded too much to despondency, and did not rouse himself to labour in his profession with becoming energy and zeal. Hence the high expectations which his early promise had inspired, were, in a great measure, disappointed. But it should be mentioned to his honour that he was always liberal in his contributions to the support of religion, and of all evangelical enterprises. He was a principal agent, and one of the most generous contributors, in the erection of the Presbyterian church edifice in Germantown, where he laboured in word and doctrine, for some time, gratuitously, and with great acceptance. His services were also acceptable in Philadelphia, where he preached, by invitation, in several of the churches, when their pulpits happened to be vacant; but he rarely went abroad to preach, partly on account of infirm health, and partly because he deemed himself but poorly fitted for that sort of labour. Indeed, although he was a man of acknowledged talents, good education, and refined taste, he failed in energy and moral courage. He gave himself up to the luxury of private study, pondering the deep things of religion, waiting, it would seem, for a providential opening to some important station, when he might have been much more advantageously employed in the great practical duties of his office. I say this, because it is due to truth, and without the least disposition to dishonour his memory. While he was, in many respects, a noble specimen of a man, one cannot but wish, in contemplating his character, that his fine powers had been

brought more fully into exercise, and that the history of his life had been a record of more extended and self-denying labours.

I am, my dear Sir,

Your brother and fellow servant in the Lord,

WILLIAM NEILL.

---

## ROBERT COOPER, D. D.\*

1765—1805.

ROBERT COOPER was born in the North of Ireland, in or about the year 1732. His father died in Ireland, while the son was yet a child. At the age of about nine, he, with two sisters, was brought by his mother to America. The family settled in Pennsylvania, probably in or near Lancaster or Carlisle. Their worldly circumstances were somewhat depressed, but his mother was active and frugal, and, in connection with what he was enabled to do for himself, managed to afford him tolerable facilities of education for that day. He was deeply sensible of the efforts which she made in his behalf, and manifested his gratitude in the most exemplary filial attentions till the close of her life. There is a tradition among his descendants that he learned the business of plough-making, in order to help himself in his education; but however this may have been, it is certain that he was obliged to labour at something to obtain the means, in part at least, of accomplishing this object; and that he occasionally left school, and engaged in manual labour, in order to meet his necessary expenses. It is supposed that he fitted for College chiefly under the instruction of the Rev. Mr. Roan, within whose congregation he resided during his earlier years, and for whom he always cherished a high regard. In due time, he became a member of the College of New Jersey, where he was graduated in September, 1763, under the Presidency of Dr. Finley.

Having determined to engage in the work of the ministry, he prosecuted a course of theological study, partly, it would seem, under the direction of his own minister, Mr. Roan, and partly under that of the Rev. (afterwards Dr.) George Duffield, then of Carlisle, afterwards of Philadelphia. He was received on trials for licensure by the (Old) Presbytery of Donegal, October 24, 1764, in little more than a year after his graduation. Having passed through his trials with great acceptance, he was licensed to preach by the Presbytery of Carlisle, February 22, 1765.

Immediately after his licensure, he was appointed by the Presbytery to supply, for a few Sabbaths, the vacant Congregation at Middle Spring; and, subsequently, a continuance of his labours was requested by that congregation: and some other congregations, particularly that at West Nottingham, then recently rendered vacant by the removal of Dr. Finley to the Presidency of New Jersey College, solicited his services. On the 18th of June, 1765, a call was presented to him by the Church at Middle Spring, accompanied with a request that, if he could not see his way clear to accept

\* MSS. from Jonathan K. Cooper, Esq., Hon. Robert C. Grier, Rev. Isaac Grier, Rev. Dr. M'Conaughy, and Rev. Dr. Matthew Brown.