

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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VOLUME III.

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FROM S. J. FORMAN, Esq.

SYRACUSE, 25th October, 1847.

Rev. and dear Sir: I regret to say that my reminiscences of the celebrated William Tennent are too scanty and unimportant to be of any use to you. Nevertheless, since you ask for them, such as I have, give I unto you.

My parents were members of Mr. Tennent's church, and my very early years were spent under his ministry. I distinctly recollect to have seen him once at my father's house, in company with some of my relatives, with whom he was there visiting. In person he was tall—of a large frame, but spare, and of a long thin visage. He wore a large white wig. I remember that his manners were very pleasing to me. When he came into the house, I heard him say to some person behind him—"in spite of your teeth;" and at the same time, he shut his own teeth, and shook the curls of his long wig, twisting his hands together, and seemed to be in very high spirits. As my mother met him at the door of her room, he clasped both her hands with both of his, in the most cordial and affectionate manner. There was a facetiousness about his whole appearance that I never could forget. The party had come for a sleigh ride, about fourteen miles, in the month of April, and returned after candle light, for fear that the snow would leave them. I have always thought that Mr. Tennent resembled the likeness of Lord Chatham.

One of Mr. Tennent's sons was a physician. At one time, he inoculated a large number for the small pox, in a spacious farm house; and, while his patients (of whom I was one) were yet under treatment, he was himself taken sick and died suddenly. The patients had to scatter to their respective homes. One of his sons was a clergyman in Charleston, S. C., where he died. While I was yet a minor in a counting-house in New York, I was sent to Charleston as a supercargo, and, during my stay in the city, Mrs. Tennent heard of me, and sent for me to come to her house. Though I was an entire stranger to her, her intimacy with some of my connections in New Jersey led her to show me that civility.

With much esteem and respect,

I am, Rev. and dear Sir,

Your very obedient servant,

S. J. FORMAN.

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## SAMUEL BLAIR.\*

1733—1751.

SAMUEL BLAIR was born in Ireland, June 14, 1712. In early youth he became hopefully a subject of renewing grace. He came to America while quite young, and received his education at the Log College, at Neshaminy, under the Rev. William Tennent. He must have been among the earliest pupils of that institution, as he was afterwards among the most distinguished men whom it sent forth. Having completed his preparatory course of both classical and theological study, he was licensed to preach, on the 9th of November, 1733, by the Presbytery of Philadelphia, and in May of the next year, was called to Middletown and Shrewsbury, and also, to Millstone

\* Miller's Ret. II.—Mass. Miss. Mag. III.—Hist. Log Coll.—Webster's MSS.

and Cranberry, N. J. He accepted the former call in September following, and shortly after was ordained.

Here he continued about five years; but there are no records remaining to indicate the amount of success that attended his labours. He was one of the original members of the Presbytery of New Brunswick, which was formed in 1738. In 1739, he was earnestly solicited to settle in New Londonderry, otherwise called Fagg's Manor, in Pennsylvania. Not being willing to decide the question of duty which this call presented to him, he referred it to the Presbytery; and, after mature deliberation, they advised him to accept the call, on the ground that it would be the means of extending his usefulness. He acted in accordance with their advice; but his installation did not take place till April, 1740, though he removed to his new residence, and commenced his labours among the people in November, 1739.

Shortly after his settlement at New Londonderry, he established a classical school of the same general character with that of Mr. Tennent, in which he had himself been educated. At this school were trained several young men, who afterwards ranked among the most prominent clergymen of the Presbyterian Church; and one at least,—the Rev. Samuel Davies, among the greater lights of his generation.

In connection with Mr. Blair's ministry at New Londonderry, there occurred, in the year 1740, a very remarkable revival of religion, of which a minute account is preserved in a letter from Mr. Blair to the Rev. Thomas Prince of Boston, published in the "Christian History."

Mr. Blair was a prominent actor in those scenes which, in his day, agitated and finally divided the Presbyterian Church. He agreed with Gilbert Tennent in his opinions, and co-operated with him in his measures; and of course rendered himself obnoxious to the "Old Side" party in the Church.

In his doctrinal views he was a thorough Calvinist, as appears from his Treatise on Predestination and Reprobation. As a preacher he was distinguished for solemnity and impressiveness: his very appearance, before he opened his lips, is said to have struck his hearers with awe. The opinion which Mr. (afterwards President) Davies entertained of his preaching, may be inferred from the following anecdote which is given upon the authority of the late Dr. Rodgers of New York:—When Mr. Davies returned from Europe, his friends were curious to learn his opinion of the celebrated preachers whom he had heard in England and Scotland. After dealing out liberal commendations on such as he had most admired, he concluded by saying that he had heard no one, who, in his judgment, was superior to his former teacher, the Rev. Samuel Blair.

Mr. Blair's last illness was contracted from his going, upon an urgent call, and in an enfeebled state of body, to meet the Trustees of New Jersey College. As he approached his end, he expressed the strongest desire to depart and be with Christ; and but a minute or two before his departure, he exclaimed, "The Bridegroom is come, and we shall now have all things." He seemed to breathe the atmosphere of Heaven, before he had actually passed the Heavenly portals. His remains lie in the burying ground of Fagg's Manor, where his monument is yet to be seen. It bears the following inscription:—

" HERE LIETH THE BODY OF  
THE REV. SAMUEL BLAIR,  
WHO DEPARTED THIS LIFE  
THE FIFTH DAY OF JULY, 1751,  
AGED THIRTY-NINE YEARS AND TWENTY-ONE DAYS.

“ In yonder sacred house I spent my breath,  
 “ Now silent, mouldering, here I lie in death;  
 “ These lips shall wake, and yet declare  
 “ A dread Amen to truths they published there.”

In the year 1754, the principal writings of Mr. Blair were collected by his brother John, and published in Philadelphia, together with an Elegy by the Rev. Samuel Davies, and Dr. Finley's Funeral Sermon. The volume contains Seven Sermons on important practical subjects, an elaborate Treatise on Predestination and Reprobation, and a “ Vindication,” written by the direction of the Presbytery of New Brunswick, in answer to “ the government of the church,” &c., by the Rev. John Thompson. As a writer, Mr. Blair seems to have been distinguished rather for profound thought, methodical arrangement, and perspicuous style, than for the graces and elegances of composition.

The following extracts from Mr. Davies' Elegy and from Dr. Finley's Funeral Sermon, show the estimate which they had of Mr. Blair's character:—

FROM MR. DAVIES' ELEGY.

“ — Blair is no more—Then this poor world has lost  
 As rich a jewel as her stores could boast;  
 Heaven, in just vengeance, has recalled again  
 Its faithful envoy from the sons of men;  
 Advanced him from his pious toils below,  
 In raptures there in kindred plains to glow.

“ O, had not the mournful news divulged,  
 My mind had still the pleasing dream indulged—  
 Still fancied Blair with health and vigour blessed,  
 With some grand purpose labouring in his breast.  
 In studious thought, pursuing Truth Divine,  
 Till the full demonstration round him shine;  
 Or from the sacred desk, proclaiming loud  
 His Master's message to the attentive crowd,  
 While Heavenly truth with bright conviction glares,  
 And coward error shrinks and disappears;  
 While quick remorse the hardy sinner feels,  
 And Calv'ry's balm the bleeding conscience heals.

“ Oh! could the Muse's languid colours paint  
 The man, the scholar, student, preacher, saint,  
 I'd place his image full in public view,  
 His friends should know more than before they knew.  
 His foes astonished at his virtues, gaze,  
 Or shrink confounded from the oppressive blaze.  
 To trace his bright example, all should turn,  
 And with the bravest emulation burn.  
 His name should my poor lays immortalize,  
 Till he, to attest his character, arise,  
 And the Great Judge the encomium ratifies.”

FROM DR. FINLEY'S FUNERAL SERMON.

“ He was blessed with early piety. On his dying bed, he could recollect with delight, various evidences of gracious influences in his tender years. By this means, he was happily preserved from being ever engaged in vicious courses; and at once grew in stature and in grace. Religion, far from being a flashy thing with him, was rational and solid, manifesting itself in unreserved obedience to all God's commandments.

“ To a holy disposition was added a great genius, capable of the highest improvement. He had a deep and penetrating judgment, a clear and regular way of conceiving things, and a retentive memory. He was an indefatigable student, a calm and impartial searcher after truth. He thought for himself, and was determined in his conclusions, only by evidence. He had a very considerable store of critical learning, and was especially conversant with the Scriptures in the original languages. How great his attainments in philosophy were, was known by few; for in his last years, his

thirst for knowledge did sensibly increase, and he greatly improved himself therein. He studied several branches of the mathematics, and especially geometry and astronomy; nor will these seem tasteless studies to one who had such a savour of living piety, when it is considered that he saw the glory of God in all his works, and admired and adored Him in all. He delighted to see the 'invisible things of Him, even his eternal power and Godhead, manifested by the things that are made.' It was edifying to him to trace the footsteps of the Divine wisdom in particulars, and the infinite reach of projection in the frame and structure of the whole.

"But his critical and philosophical learning, and his large acquaintance with geography and history, were exceeded by his knowledge in Divinity. This was the business of his life, and herein he made such proficiency as few of his standing in the ministry have attained unto. Here he found what perfectly answered his refined spiritual taste. The contemplation of redeeming love did much more elevate his soul, than that of the works of creation; for therein he saw the wisdom, the power, the justice, and the love of God, more clearly displayed. On every subject he had a set of most accurately studied thoughts. He had often weighed in an impartial balance every theological controversy; and was a solid disputant, and able to defend all necessary truth. He was a judicious casuist, and could very satisfactorily resolve dubious and perplexed cases of conscience. He was not only a proficient in systematic Divinity, which is comparatively a small attainment, but a great textuary. He studied the sacred oracles above all other things, and that it was not in vain, manifestly appeared from his great ability in dividing the word of truth. He could 'bring out of his treasure things new and old.' How clearly and fully would he explain his subject! with what irresistible arguments confirm the truth! with what admirable dexterity accommodate it to his audience! and with what solemn pungency did he impress it on the conscience! He spoke like one who knew the worth of souls, and felt in himself the surest constraints of love to God and man.

"As to his religious principles, he was of noble and generous sentiments. He had not so learned Christ as to be furious in his zeal for mere circumstantial or indifferent points. He understood the nature of religion better than to place it in things in which it does not consist; and was too much exercised about the great matters of the law, to be equally zealous for 'mint, anise and cummin.' Though sacrifice be good, yet he had learned that 'mercy is better.' He believed, and that in accordance with the Scriptures, that the communion of saints is of much greater importance, than many of those things in which Christians differ in judgment, and was, therefore, far from such narrowness, as to make every principle and practice which he thought to be good and true, a term of communion; and he was as far from the contrary extreme of indifference to the truth, and laxness of discipline. As he was diligent in the exercise of his ministerial office, to the utmost of his strength, not sparing himself, so did God very remarkably succeed his faithful ministrations to the conversion of many souls. He was the spiritual father of great numbers. I have had acquaintance with Christians in different places, where he only preached occasionally, who gave all hopeful evidences of a sacred conversion, and acknowledged him to be the instrument of it. He was strict in discipline, yet so as to be still candid; and severely just, yet so as to be still compassionate and tender. And with what wisdom and circumspection he judged in difficult cases, his brethren of the Presbytery well knew. We waited for his sage remarks, and heard attentively his prudent reasonings; and after his words, how seldom had any one occasion to speak again! 'His speech dropped upon us, and we waited for him as for the rain.' He has been eminently serviceable to the Church, by assisting several promising youths in their studies for the ministry; who, becoming learned by his instructions, and formed by his example, are now wise, useful and faithful ministers.

He was remarkably grave and solemn in his aspect and deportment; yet, of a cheerful, even, and pleasant temper. And in conversation with his intimate friends, facetious and witty, when the season and concurring circumstances would allow him to indulge in that way; in respect of which, his prudence could well direct him. He was of a generous and liberal disposition,—far from being niggardly or covetous; was foremost in acts of charity to the indigent, according to his ability, and in all his conduct discovered a noble indifference toward earthly things.

"If we consider him as a friend, he was as firm and steadfast, and might as much be depended upon, as any I ever knew. He was remote from precarious and fickle humours; his approbation was not easily obtained, nor easily lost. Nor was he a friend only in compliment, but would cheerfully undergo hardships, and suffer disadvantages, in order to do a friendly office. He was conscientiously punctual in attending ecclesiastical judicatures, Presbyteries or Synods. His presence might be depended upon, if nothing extraordinary intervened, as certainly as the appointed day. He was not absent on every trifling inconvenience. In this respect his conduct was truly exemplary, and demonstrated his constant care for the public interests of religion. So great was his attention to matters of common concern, as to incline him rather to expose himself, than balk an opportunity of doing good.

"In social life also, he was worthy of imitation. As a husband, he was affectionate and kind; as a father, tender and indulgent. In him, condescension and authority were duly tempered. There was *that* in him that could engage love and command reverence at the same time. Who that was acquainted with him, would not be ready to say,—'happy was the family of which he was the head, and happy the congregation that enjoyed his ministry—happy the judicature of which he was a member, and happy the person who was favoured with his friendship!' He was a public blessing to the Church, an honour to his people, an ornament to his profession, who 'magnified his office.' He spoke as he believed; he practised as he preached; he lived holy, and died joyfully.

"For a long course of years, he had a habitual, increasing assurance of his interest in the favour of God, and that a blessed and glorious eternity would one day open upon him; which were his own emphatical words on his dying bed. This his assurance, was solid and scriptural, arising from the many and clear experiences he had of gracious communications to his soul. He was made sensible in his early years of his guilty state by nature as well as practice; felt his inability to deliver himself; saw plainly that he lay at mercy, and that it was entirely at God's pleasure to save or reject him. This view of the case created in him a restless concern, until the way of life through Jesus Christ was graciously discovered to him. Thus he saw that God could save him in consistency with all the honours of governing justice; for that the obedience and sufferings of Christ in the room of sinners have made a sufficient atonement for sin. He saw that Christ was a Saviour every way complete and suitable for him. His soul approved the Divine and glorious plan; and freely disclaiming all dependance on his own righteousness, wisdom and strength, most gladly accepted the offer of the Gospel, that Christ should be his 'wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption.' Strict holiness was his choice, and it was the delightful business of his life to do always those things which pleased his Heavenly Father. And on his dying bed, he had the full approbation and testimony of his conscience, as to the general bent and tenor of his life. These particulars are the heads of what he himself told me in his last sickness, and are delivered in the same order, as near as I can possibly recollect."

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## DAVID COWELL.\*

1735—1761.

DAVID COWELL was born in Wrentham, Mass., in the year 1704. He was graduated at Harvard College in 1732. Having studied Theology, and received license to preach, he went to Trenton, N. J., in the autumn of 1735, where he was employed to supply a vacant pulpit. On the 7th of April, 1736, he received a call to settle there, which he accepted; and the Presbytery of Philadelphia ordained and installed him on the 3d of November following. The sermon on the occasion was preached by the Rev. Jedediah Andrews of Philadelphia.

In the division of the Presbyterian Church in 1741, Mr. Cowell maintained a somewhat neutral position. He remained with the Old Side, and had no sympathy with what he regarded the extreme measures of the New Brunswick party; but he still remained in intimate relations with President Burr, and others belonging to the same side. The Commissions of the two Synods met at Trenton, in 1749, to consult in regard to a re-union, and Mr. Cowell was chosen Moderator; but nothing more decisive was done at the meeting, than to agree that each Synod should more fully prepare proposals of reconciliation, and that there should be, in the meantime, a mutual endeavour to cultivate a friendly and fraternal spirit.

\* Hodge's Hist. Presb. Ch.—Webster's MSS.—Rev. Dr. Pierce's MSS.—MS. from Rev. Dr. John Hall.