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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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SAMUEL MARTIN, D. D.

1793—1845.

FROM THE REV. WILLIAM FINNEY.

CHURCHVILLE, Md., April 10, 1850.

Rev. and dear Sir: In accordance with your request, I herewith furnish you with some brief notices of the late Rev. Dr. Samuel Martin. Although his life did not abound in those thrilling incidents which sometimes lend a charm to our reminiscences of great and good men, yet it was full of interest. It was a beautiful development of the unpretending spirit of the Christian, and the uniform devotedness of the able and well furnished Minister of the New Testament.

Dr. Martin conducted my theological studies in early life; and it was my privilege until his death, during the long period of thirty-seven years, to share largely in his friendship, and often have I been tempted to regret that a higher post had not been assigned him in the Church, where his talents and attainments would have been better appreciated, and his influence exerted upon a wider field.

SAMUEL MARTIN was born in Chestnut Level, Lancaster County, Pa., on the 9th of January, 1767. His parents, Samuel and Agnes Martin, emigrated from Ireland about the year 1754. They were consistent and exemplary members of the Associate Church, and, like Zacharias and Elizabeth, "walked in the ordinances and commandments of the Lord blameless." Their third son, the subject of this sketch, early manifested a preference for the Presbyterian Church. The days of his boyhood he spent in labours upon the farm on which his father resided, with the exception of occasionally passing a few months, especially in the winter season, at some common school in the neighbourhood. Favoured with that kind of early training which might be expected from his excellent parents, it is not strange that he should grow up free from open vice, and that, from a child he should have known the Holy Scriptures. It was not, however, until his twenty-second year, that he became deeply anxious about his soul, and was made, as he himself believed, a subject of saving grace. On a certain Sabbath in the summer of that year, he had heard an impressive sermon from the Pastor of the Church of Chestnut Level,—afterwards the esteemed and venerable Dr. James Latta. During the afternoon of that day, he sat in his father's porch, and read Erskine on the Believer's right to appropriate by faith the promises of the Gospel. Suddenly, the conviction flashed upon his mind that he had not that right. To shake off the painful feeling it occasioned, he took a long and solitary walk. But his distress became so great before his return, that he threw himself upon the ground, and cried for mercy. His anguish increased every moment, and seemed to deepen, as the shadows of evening closed around him. He spent a sleepless and prayerful night, and, as day appeared, fell into a disturbed and broken slumber. During that slumber, he dreamed that he was in a long dark passage,—so low that he was not able to walk erect. After groping his way for a considerable time, in great distress and horror of mind, he came to what he supposed to be a door. On his uttering a cry of distress, the door instantly flew open, and the dark passage was filled with a flood of

light. When he awoke, light seemed to have dawned upon his soul, and he was enabled to cast his trembling spirit into the arms of mercy. He did not value dreams, and did not attach any particular importance to the one just related, and but seldom mentioned the circumstance; but still he recollected it with pleasure almost every day of his after life, and spoke of it with deep interest but a short time before his death.

From that period may be dated the commencement of his walk with God, and his determination to devote himself to the Gospel ministry. His preliminary studies were pursued under the superintendence of the Rev. Dr. Latta, and the Rev. Dr. Smith of Pequea. To meet the expenses of his college course, he spent two years in teaching a grammar school in Westchester, Pa., and one year at St. George's in Delaware. But notwithstanding the many embarrassments to which he was subjected, his native energy of character surmounted them all, and he soon distinguished himself by a rapid improvement in the different branches of a substantial education. He graduated at the University of Pennsylvania, on the 8th of July, 1790, where, throughout his whole course, he maintained a high standing in his class, and enjoyed the confidence and esteem of the Professors. He could not, however, be called a laborious student. That knowledge which many acquire by a slow and painful process, he obtained with but little effort; and hence he depended more, in after life, upon the excitement of the passing moment than on any previous preparation;—a habit from which he found it difficult to escape, though he decidedly condemned it. He laid hold of his subject at once, and with an iron grasp. So retentive was his memory that it seldom or never failed him. He could relate the incidents of former years in all their minute details, without omitting a single circumstance. His imagination was strong and vivid, but controlled by a sound and discriminating judgment. Although he possessed talents of a very high order, he carefully avoided whatever savoured of display. On this subject he was perhaps unduly sensitive; for it was not until pressed by circumstances, and deeply excited by the occasion, that his noble powers were fully called into exercise.

Mr. Martin was licensed by the Presbytery of Baltimore, in May, 1793, and was soon after ordained and installed Pastor of the Congregation of Slateridge in York County, Pa. Here he laboured faithfully among the people of his charge, and conducted, at the same time, a classical school, to eke out a slender support. In that school he educated a number of young men, some of whom now stand high in office and in public estimation, and cherish with no common feelings of gratitude and affection the memory of their early preceptor.

At the expiration of five years, he accepted a call from the Congregation of Chanceford, for one half of his ministerial services. In this wide field he laboured until the year 1812, when he removed to Rockville, Montgomery County, Md. At Rockville he continued but about eighteen months, when he accepted a unanimous invitation to return to Chanceford. His whole ministerial life of nearly fifty years, with the exception of the short time he was at Rockville, was spent in the Congregations of Slateridge and Chanceford, and it was while labouring among the people whom he loved, and in whose spiritual welfare he was deeply interested, that he appeared to the greatest advantage as a diligent and faithful minister of Jesus Christ. His ministerial qualifications were of no common order. An intimation that he

was expected to preach in any of the neighbouring congregations, always secured a crowded house. His sermons were seldom written, and the few that *were* written fell below the average standard of his extemporaneous efforts. His first thoughts upon almost every subject seemed to be his best. His common preparation for the Sabbath was a few short notes; and when preparing them, he had usually no books around him but his Bible and Concordance. He rather thought for himself than gathered from the thoughts of others. His sermons were delivered with energy and animation, and while they conveyed light and knowledge to the head, they found their way to the heart. It was not the drapery of a splendid rhetoric thrown around common place ideas, that chained the attention of his hearers—it was rather the freshness and originality of glowing thoughts thrown out in their simple grandeur. His earnest and impressive manner left upon the minds of his hearers the conviction that he preached not himself, and that he was filled with zeal for his Master's glory, and love for the souls of men. He was an active and efficient member of Presbytery; and in the higher Ecclesiastical Courts he was surpassed by few as an able debater, and zealous advocate for the doctrines and government of the Presbyterian Church.

As a man, he possessed traits of character peculiarly attractive. It was difficult to know and not esteem him. He exhibited, in beautiful combination, the lofty characteristics of a noble mind with the simplicity and playfulness of the child. Remarkably free from worldly ambition, his grand aim was to be useful. Without guile himself, he never suspected others, and never seemed to feel himself above the level of the humblest individual that approached him. And yet he was a master in Israel;—one whom the wisest might consult with the certainty of receiving benefit and instruction. His habits were almost to a fault domestic. He loved with uncommon devotedness the endearments of home, and the peaceful enjoyments of his own fireside. As a friend, he was sincere, generous and ardent. He knew nothing of cold, calculating reserve—with his hand you had his heart, and with that heart no ordinary friendship. With the sweet charm of piety diffused over so many attractive qualities, it is not strange that he should have descended through the vale of years with the affections of a confiding family, and the sympathies of a devoted people, clustering around him.

Amidst the infirmities of age and the attacks of a painful disease, he continued his favourite employment of preaching the Gospel, until within a few months of his decease. Towards the close of his life, he seemed to be rapidly ripening for Heaven. His natural cheerfulness visibly abated, and although he was never morose, he became unusually grave. He had a presentiment that his end was not far distant; and, placing himself in an attitude of readiness, patiently awaited the result, and calmly looked for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life. When he saw that the time of his departure had nearly come, he was perfectly collected; and though there was little or none of that rapture which sometimes marks the death-bed scene of the man who has walked with God, there was that which was equally, if not even more, satisfactory—a calm, unwavering confidence in the meritorious sacrifice of Christ. Death came at last in its mildest form, and about midnight of the holy Sabbath, (June 29, 1845,) the last sands of his glass passed down, and his spirit ascended to the “rest that remaineth for the people of God.”

The degree of Doctor of Divinity was conferred upon him by Jefferson College in 1824.

When about thirty years of age, and about the time he accepted a call from the Congregation of Slateridge, he was married to Rosanna Irwin, whose early home was but a few miles distant from his own. In that connection he was peculiarly happy. His wife was indeed an help meet for him. Pious, intelligent, and gifted in no ordinary degree, she rendered his home a hallowed and delightful resting place. She survived him about two years; and now they both sleep under a chaste and beautiful monument erected by the Congregation of Chanceford. Dr. Martin buried four of his children in infancy,—one of them an only son. Four daughters have survived him. Three of them are respectably married, and comfortably settled in the Congregation of which their father was Pastor. The other daughter is the wife of the Rev. George Inglis, whose father was the predecessor of the lamented Nevins of Baltimore.

Dr. Martin published two Discourses, in which the doctrine of Election is proved and illustrated, 1806; and one on Regeneration, printed in the "Spruce Street Lectures." He published also a Sermon in the "Presbyterian Preacher," Pittsburg, entitled, "Children are an heritage of the Lord." Besides a number of fugitive pieces in different religious periodicals, he published Sermons on the death of the Rev. Messrs. William Kerr,* Robert White,† Reuben H. Davis,‡ and George Morrison.§

I am, my dear Sir,

Very respectfully and affectionately yours,

WILLIAM FINNEY.

* WILLIAM KERR was born in Bart Township, Lancaster County, Pa., in 1777; was educated at the institution which afterwards became Jefferson College; studied Theology, partly under the Rev. Dr. Sample, and partly at Princeton; was settled in the ministry at Donegal, Lancaster County, Pa., about 1809, and died in 1823, in his forty-seventh year. Dr. Martin said of him,—“Few, if any, stood higher in the estimation of his brethren.”

† ROBERT WHITE was born in Montgomery County, Pa., about the year 1785; received his classical and mathematical education at Norristown, under the direction of General Porter; studied Theology under the Rev. Nathan Grier, of the Forks of Brandywine, whose eldest daughter he married in 1809; became Pastor of the Church at Fagg's Manor in 1810; and, after a ministry there of twenty-five years, died September 20, 1835. He published a Sermon designed to prove that Job was Melchisedec. His successor in the ministry, the Rev. A. Hamilton, says of him,—“His people regarded him with great affection, and thought him, as he was in truth, a laborious, tender-hearted, prayerful pastor.”

‡ REUBEN H. DAVIS was licensed and ordained by the Presbytery of Newcastle, but never had a pastoral charge. He taught a classical school, first in Baltimore, and afterwards in Bel-Air, Md., with great acceptance. He died December 4, 1835, aged forty-seven years.

§ GEORGE MORRISON, was the Pastor of the Bethel Congregation in Harford County, Md. He taught an Academy for a number of years in Baltimore, and afterwards superintended a school in connection with his pastoral charge at Bethel.