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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 ROBERT CARTER & BROTHERS,

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“How like to that thy kindred angels feel.
 “Cloth’d in humility thy virtues shone,
 “In every eye illustrious but thine own.
 “How like thy Master on whose friendly breast,
 “Thou oft hast leaned and shalt forever rest.”

His wife, Mrs. Parnell Davenport, died on the 21st of August, 1789, aged sixty years. They both lie buried in a small burying ground, about a mile West from Pennington, N. J.

They had two children. The eldest,—a daughter, by the name of *Elizabeth*, was married to a Mr. Kelley, who resided at Princeton, N. J. The son, *John*, was born at Philippi, N. J., August 11, 1752; was graduated at the College of New Jersey in 1769; studied Theology, partly under Dr. Bellamy, and partly under Dr. Buell of East Hampton, L. I.; was ordained June 4, 1775, and served the congregation of Southold as a stated supply for two years; preached for some time at Bedford, N. Y.; was installed at Deerfield, August 12, 1795, and was dismissed on account of ill health in 1805. In 1809, he returned to the State of New York, and died at Lysander, July 13, 1821. He was, in early life, an intimate friend of Aaron Burr. While Davenport was studying Theology under Dr. Buell, and Burr was residing with Dr. Bellamy, the former wrote to the latter a letter which is in my possession,—of which the following is an extract:—“I hope you are by this time fully resolved to engage in the sacred work of the ministry, and that you see your way clear to do it. You are placed under a very judicious as well as pious divine, whose instruction and conversation have, I hope, proved to your spiritual benefit. I rejoice to find you are pleased with your situation, and wish it may continue.”



WILLIAM ROBINSON.*

1740—1746.

WILLIAM ROBINSON was the son of a Quaker,—a man of wealth, and an eminent physician, and was born near Carlisle, England, a little after the beginning of the eighteenth century. He expected to inherit considerable property, not only from his father, but from an aunt in London; but, on going to London to visit that aunt, he greatly overstaid the time which had been allowed him, and plunged into the dissipations of the city, thereby contracting debts which his aunt refused to pay, and which he knew would excite the indignation of his father. Being unable to remain in London, and fearing to return home, he resolved to seek his fortune in America. To this proposal his aunt gave a reluctant consent, and furnished him with a small sum of money to assist in carrying out his purpose. On his arrival in this country, he found it necessary to engage in some active business for his support; and he betook himself to teaching a school in Hopewell, N. J., within the bounds of the Presbytery of New Brunswick. It seems probable that he taught a classical school in the State of Delaware also; for Samuel Davies, whose parents resided in Delaware, was, at one time, one of his pupils. We hear nothing of his erratic tendencies after he left England;

* Hist. Log Coll.—Foote's Sketches of Va., I.—Webster's MSS.

and his habits, from the time that he came hither, seem to have been those of a correct and sober man.

He had been engaged in his school for some time, before his mind was practically directed to the subject of religion; and the manner in which this was finally brought about, was somewhat remarkable. As he was riding at a late hour one evening, when the moon and stars were shining with uncommon brightness, he was saying to himself,—“How transcendently glorious must be the author of all this beauty and grandeur!” And the thought struck him with irresistible force,—“But what do I know of this God? Have I ever sought his favour, or made Him my friend?” This impression never left him, until he found peace and joy in believing. He soon resolved to devote himself to the work of the ministry; and with reference to this, prosecuted his academical and theological studies at the Log College, while he went on with his school. He was received under the care of the New Brunswick Presbytery on the 1st of April, 1740; and, on the 27th of May following, was licensed to preach the Gospel. On the 4th of August, 1741, he was ordained at New Brunswick *sine titulo*.

In August, 1742, he received a call to settle at Neshaminy, as successor to the Rev. William Tennent, but declined it. The next winter, he was sent as an evangelist, by the Presbytery of Newcastle, in consequence of an earnest request from the people, to visit the Presbyterian settlements in the Valley of the Shenandoah, and on the South side of James River, in Virginia; and the numerous settlements of North Carolina, on the Haw. Soon after entering Virginia, he was seized, near Winchester, by the Sheriff of Orange County, and required to go to Williamsburg to answer to the Governor for preaching without a license. Before he had proceeded far, however, the Sheriff, finding that he was evidently a sensible and well disposed man, released him, and suffered him to pursue his mission unmolested. He passed the winter in Carolina, and, in consequence of imprudent exposures, contracted a disease from which he never recovered. On his return, he preached with great effect to the Presbyterian settlements in Charlotte, Prince Edward, Campbell, and Albermarle, Counties. Here he was waited upon by a deputation, that persuaded him, instead of pursuing his contemplated route to the head of the Shenandoah, to return to Hanover. The people in whose behalf his services were solicited, were far from being agreed in their religious views; some of them having reached the point of denying not only the efficacy but the expediency of good works, and of doubting whether it was right to pray, as prayer could not alter the Divine purposes. The delegates who waited upon him, having heard him preach, (as they were instructed to do, before extending to him an invitation to return with them,) were somewhat divided in opinion concerning his doctrines; but they finally gave him a cordial invitation in the name of the congregations. He at first declined; but their importunity at length prevailed, and he made his arrangements to visit Hanover.

On his arrival at Hanover, several prominent individuals had an interview with him, and examined his testimonials, and satisfied themselves in regard to his views of Christian doctrine and practice, and the measures which he proposed to adopt. He submitted to their examination with the utmost meekness and readiness, and led them to form high hopes in regard to the success of his labours. He preached to them, for the first time, on Sabbath, July 6, 1743; and it was the first sermon from a Presbyterian min-

ister ever heard in Hanover County. He continued preaching for four successive days; during which the congregation regularly increased, and the impression became constantly deeper. An individual, who was present, giving an account of this series of exercises, seven years after, says—"There is reason to believe there was as much good done by these four sermons, as by all the sermons preached in these parts before or since." And he adds—"Before Mr. Robinson left us, he successfully endeavoured to correct some of our mistakes, and to bring us to carry on the worship of God more regularly at our meetings. After this, we met to read good sermons, and began and concluded with prayer and singing of Psalms, which, till then, we had omitted."

Mr. Robinson, having passed four days, labouring publicly and privately among these people, was constrained to take his departure, in order to meet other engagements; and besides, it began to be rumoured that measures were about to be taken to arrest him as an itinerant. The people, partly to compensate him for his arduous labours, and partly to testify their gratitude towards him, made him a handsome present in money; but he refused to receive it; and when they urged it upon him, he still persevered in his refusal, believing that the peculiar circumstances of the case would not justify him in any other course. The committee to whom the matter was entrusted, being still resolved to carry their point, put it into the hands of a gentleman with whom he was to lodge the night before leaving the county, with instructions that he should deposit it privately in his saddle-bags, not doubting that when he found it there after his departure, he would appropriate it to his own use. This was accordingly done; but, in the morning, when Mr. Robinson came to lift his saddle-bags, he found them much heavier than usual, and, on opening them, immediately discovered the cause. He smiled at the benevolent artifice, and said,—“I see you are resolved I shall have your money; I will take it; but, as I have told you before, I do not need it; I have enough, nor will I appropriate it to my own use; but there is a young man of my acquaintance, of promising talents and piety, who is now studying with a view to the ministry; but his circumstances are embarrassing; he has not funds to support and carry him on without much difficulty; this money will relieve him from his pecuniary difficulties: I will take charge of it, and appropriate it to his use; and, as soon as he is licensed, we will send him to visit you; it may be that you may now, by your liberality, be educating a minister for yourselves.” The young man here referred to was Samuel Davies, afterwards the illustrious President Davies. Mr. Robinson applied the money as he had promised; and, in due time, Mr. Davies went to Hanover,—chiefly it is said, in consideration of his peculiar obligations to the people, and remained there ten years, making so broad and deep a mark in the character of the community, that time has done little to efface it.

Mr. Robinson's labours, during this tour, were arduous and unremitted, and withal eminently successful. His health, after this, visibly declined; but still he kept at his work, being employed part of the time in the State of New York, and part of the time in Maryland;—and a rich blessing seems everywhere to have attended his labours. Mr. (afterwards President) Davies renders the following testimony concerning him:—

“In Maryland also there has been a considerable revival, (shall I call it?) or first plantation of religion. * * * * In Kent County and in Queen Anne's, a number

of careless sinners have been awakened and hopefully brought to Christ. The work was begun, and mostly carried on, by the instrumentality of that favoured man, Mr. Robinson, whose success, whenever I reflect upon it, astonishes me. Oh, he did much in a little time; and who would not choose such an expeditious pilgrimage through this world? There are in these places a considerable congregation, and they have made repeated efforts to obtain a settled minister. But the most glorious display of Divine grace in Maryland has been in and about Somerset County. It began, I think, in 1745, by the ministry of Mr. Robinson, and was afterwards carried on by several ministers who preached transiently there."

On the 19th of March, 1746, Mr. Robinson was dismissed from the Presbytery of New Brunswick to the Presbytery of New Castle, with a view to his becoming the pastor of the congregation in St. George's, De.;—a congregation which had been gathered under his labours, in connection with those of Mr. Whitefield. But in April following, before he had yet been installed over his charge, his earthly course was finished. His Funeral Sermon was preached on the 3d of the succeeding August, by the Rev. Samuel Blair. He bequeathed his library to his friend and beneficiary, the Rev. Samuel Davies. There remains little documentary testimony concerning him; but there is a uniform tradition that he was an eminently devout and benevolent man, and one of the most vigorous and effective preachers of his day.

The following anecdote is related on the authority of the late Rev. Dr. Hill of Virginia:—

"On the night before Mr. Robinson was to preach in Hanover for the first time, he rode late to reach a tavern within some eight or ten miles from the place of preaching. The tavern keeper was a shrewd, boisterous, profane man. When uttering some horrid oaths, Mr. Robinson ventured to reprove him for his profanity; and although it was done in a mild way, the innkeeper gave him a sarcastic look, and said, 'Pray, Sir, who are you to take such authority upon yourself?' 'I am a minister of the Gospel,' says Mr. Robinson. 'Then you belie your looks very much,' was the reply. [It is said that Mr. Robinson had the small pox very severely, which had given him a very rough visage, and deprived him of the sight of one of his eyes. It was with reference to his forbidding appearance that the innkeeper seemed to question his ministerial character.] 'But,' says Mr. Robinson, 'if you wish certainly to know whether I am a minister or not, if you will accompany me, you may be convinced by hearing me preach.' 'I will,' says the innkeeper, 'if you will preach from a text I will give you.' 'Let me hear it,' says Mr. Robinson, 'and if there is nothing unsuitable in it, I will.' The waggish innkeeper gave him the passage from the Psalms—'I am fearfully and wonderfully made.' Mr. Robinson agreed that it should be one of his texts. The man was at Mr. Robinson's meeting, and that text was the theme of one of his sermons. Before it was finished, the wicked man was made to feel that he was the monster, and that he was fearfully and wonderfully made. It is said that he became a very pious and useful member of the church."

Dr. Alexander says,—

"Probably Mr. Robinson, during the short period of his life, was the instrument in the conversion of as many souls, as any minister who ever lived in this country. The only circumstance relating to his person which has come down, is, that he was blind of one eye; so that by some he was called 'the one-eyed Robinson.'"