

✓
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 IX.
—

NEW YORK:
ROBERT CARTER & BROTHERS,
530 BROADWAY.
1869.

notes, which, I believe, were always written in short hand. He made much more use of the Scriptures in the way of proof and illustration than is common at this day, or, I believe I may add, than was common even in his own. He kept his hearers constantly impressed with the idea that he was delivering to them not only the mind, but to a great extent the very letter, of the Spirit. His voice, though sufficiently distinct, was rather feeble; his gestures were few and not particularly forcible; and his general manner by no means distinguished for extraordinary animation. But there was such evident sincerity pervading every thing that he said, and so much good sense, combined with rich evangelical instruction, that no one of a docile spirit could fail to be at once interested and edified by his ministrations. I ought to add that my impressions in regard to his preaching are derived more from the testimony of others than from my own observation. In my early life, when he used to visit my father, I remember hearing him preach in a barn in the neighbourhood in which we lived; but, after I came to live in his family, the only public service I ever heard him perform was at the Communion table, when his voice had become so feeble that it was not without great difficulty that he could be heard.

As a Pastor, he was a model of prudence, fidelity and affection. He estimated highly this kind of ministerial influence, and always aimed to make the most of it. His visits were, for the most part, strictly pastoral, and designed immediately to subserve the spiritual interests of his flock.

Though Mr. Proudfit was decided in his denominational preferences, he was a truly liberal minded man, and had a cordial welcome for all who seemed to him to bear the Saviour's image. As an illustration of this, I may mention that he cheerfully co-operated in the formation of the Northern Missionary Society, which was composed of Christians and Ministers of different denominations, and was its first President. Had he lived at the present day, when there is much more of commingling of the various Christian sects, I doubt not that both his principles and his spirit would have brought him still more largely and extensively in contact with other denominations.

In the Judicatories of the Church his modesty always disposed him to give place to others, and he was never a forward or noisy member of any Public Body. But he was always discreet and judicious, and accomplished more by wise counsels than most others did by long speeches. He was held in great respect not only by his own Body, but by Christians of all denominations, and by the community at large.

With great respect I am truly yours,
R. PROUDFIT.

JOHN MASON, D.D.

1761—1792.

FROM THE REV. JOHN B. DALES, D.D.

PHILADELPHIA, May 24, 1849.

Rev. and dear Sir: It gives me great pleasure to learn that among the honoured and useful ministers whom your work is designed to commemorate, is the venerable Dr. John Mason, (father of the late Dr. John M. Mason,) of New York. I have taken some pains to investigate his history, by a reference to Presbyterian and Synodical records, and have gathered also whatever traditionary

information I could obtain, that seemed sufficiently authentic; and, though the materials, after all, are very scanty, I am inclined to think that I have succeeded in bringing together nearly all that now remains concerning this venerable man.

JOHN MASON was born near Mid-Calder, in the County of Linlithgow, Scotland, in the year 1734, being the eldest son of the family. His father was a farmer, and both his parents, who were eminently pious persons, died while he was quite young, but not till they had had time to impress him with the obligations of early piety.

His early training was under the influence of the Associate or Secession Church of Scotland, in its best days. On the 9th of April, 1746, this branch of the Church which, in thirteen years, had grown from a small Presbytery into a large and useful Synod, was unhappily divided, by what was termed the "Burgess oath,"* into the Burgher and Anti-Burgher parties, each claiming to be the true Associate Synod. With the latter of them Mr. Mason identified himself, and, after a thorough preparatory course, pursued his theological studies at Abernethy, with the Rev. Alexander Moncrieff, the first Professor of Divinity in the Anti-Burgher Synod. At the age of twenty he spoke the Latin language, in discoursing upon History, Philosophy and Theology, with as much ease as his mother tongue; and, at the age of twenty-four, was an assistant Professor in Logic and Moral Philosophy in the Theological Institution where he had himself studied. His piety also manifestly kept pace with his literary attainments; and, even at that early period of his life, he was remarkable for his spiritual fervour and devotion,—spending much of his time in his closet, and sanctifying all his studies and labours with the Word of God and with prayer.

At length the time arrived for his entrance on the work to which he had devoted himself. In the spring of 1761 the Synod, having received an earnest petition from a Congregation in New York, (long known as the "Cedar Street Church,") directed his Presbytery to ordain him to the office of the Holy Ministry. This was done; and he was immediately sent out, as one eminently fitted, by his intellectual and spiritual endowments, as well as by a warm attachment to the peculiarities of his Church, for that highly important and responsible place. He came in company with the Rev. Messrs. Robert Annan and John Smart†; and, arriving in June, was shortly afterwards installed in the pastoral charge of the people that had called him. His heart became deeply engaged in his work; and so much was he affected by the general destitution of the Gospel in its purity and power throughout the country, that the next spring he addressed several communications to the Synod in Scotland, soliciting, in the most earnest manner, for additional aid. Accordingly, the Synod designated a number to this field; only one of whom, however, Mr. William Marshall, a native of Abernethy, and at that time a student under Mr. Moncrieff, became an efficient labourer. By order of the Synod, he was licensed at an early day, and sent to this work; and, after

* This oath was the one administered to all town officers, and the clause which occasioned all the painful and disastrous results to the Secession Church, was as follows:—"Here I protest, before God and your lordships, that I profess and allow with my heart the true religion, presently professed within this realm, and authorized by the laws thereof; I shall abide thereat and defend the same till my life's end,—renouncing the Roman religion, called Papistry." The question was,—Can members of the Associate Synod profess, as the true religion, that which the State establishes in the Church from which the Secession was made? Burghers said Aye—Anti-Burghers said Nay.

† Mr. Smart, after remaining a few years in this country, returned to Scotland, where he spent the remainder of his life.

labouring for some time, was ordained to the pastoral charge of the Congregation of Deep Run and Neshaminy, Bucks county, Pa., August 30, 1765,—Mr. Mason preaching the Sermon from John iii, 10, and constituting the pastoral relation.

Shortly after this Mr. Mason became deeply interested in the relations between the Burghers and the Anti-Burghers in this Country; and, feeling that the matters which alienated brethren in Scotland ought not to separate them here, and that the hands of all would be strengthened by gathering these different Bodies together, he earnestly undertook to effect a union between them. The dispute which had long been carried on between the two Secession Synods at home, he characterized as “the dry, the fruitless, the disgracing and pernicious controversy about the Burgess Oath.” He said,—“This controversy has done infinite injury to the cause of God in Scotland, and wherever it has shed its malignant influences. For my own part I cannot reflect upon it without shame and perplexity. Though we differ only about the meaning of some Burgess Oaths and Acts of Parliament, yet our mutual opposition has been as fierce as probably it would have been had we differed about the most important points of Christianity. The infatuation we have fallen into will amaze posterity.” With this feeling he went forward, and though his course displeased the Synod in Scotland, and even caused his name to be erased from the roll, “as no longer entitled to a seat among them, until there should be an opportunity for bringing his case to a final trial,” yet he saw much of his heart’s desire and prayer granted,—the distinction between the Burghers and the Anti-Burghers, in this country, entirely broken down; and a consequent happy increase of vital godliness in the churches, and of saving knowledge among the destitute in various parts of the land.

Up to the month of May, 1776, there was but one Associate Presbytery in this country. This was the “Associate Presbytery of Pennsylvania, subordinate to the Associate Synod of Edinburgh,” and there were thirteen ministers members of it. These were scattered over such a wide extent of country, and their meeting together was attended with so great expense of money and time, that they found it impossible to have that active co-operation which is necessary for most effectively advancing the cause of Christ. Mr. Mason, therefore, early favoured a division of the Presbytery, which, after some discussion, was effected with general unanimity. And though this division was blamed by the Synod in Scotland, inasmuch as it was made without consulting that Supreme Judicatory, yet, so far as this country was concerned, harmony and efficiency were happily promoted by it, and the good work was more energetically and successfully carried forward. The division of the Presbytery into two, and the facility which was thus afforded ministers of holding regular official intercourse, really promoted the unity and efficiency which Mr. Mason so ardently sought.

This movement, in behalf of what was supposed to be the best interests of the Scottish Churches in the Provinces, was early afterwards followed by another towards a union of an extensive and most important kind. Thus far the several Reformed Presbyteries,—the Associate which was organized in 1754, and the Reformed Presbyterian or Covenanter, in 1774, had been subordinate to Synods in Scotland. During the War of the Revolution, however, the communication with the mother country had been almost entirely interrupted, and the ministers in the several Presbyteries had been led to feel a painful necessity for Synods, and an ecclesiastical state of things adapted to their new condition in the land of their adoption. But they were weak in their separate and divided position. Mr.

Mason, therefore, readily listened to any proposition which had in view a union of brethren, of "like precious faith;" and after some years of prayerful conference and deliberation, he and his friends, the Rev. Robert Annan of Wallkill, N. Y., and the Rev. James Proudfit of New Perth, now Salem, N. Y., agreed to a basis which was accepted by the entire Reformed Presbytery, composed of the Rev. Messrs. Cuthbertson,* Dobbin and Lind. After further negotiations, these Presbyteries met with the Associate Presbytery of Pennsylvania, at Pequea, and on the 13th of June, 1782, agreed upon a general union. And that the very name of the United Body might be indicative of its origin, it was styled, "The Associate Reformed Church."

In all these movements Mr. Mason bore a leading part, drafting, as is believed, the leading articles of the basis of Union; and he was honoured with the office of Moderator, at the first meeting of the United Body in General Synod, October, 1783. Indeed, whatever tended to the unity of the visible Body of Christ was most congenial to his feelings. And, from the time that this union was consummated, he seemed to labour with even greater interest and success than ever. Nor was he without ample furniture for his work. He was a man of sound and vigorous mind, of extensive learning and fervent piety. As a Preacher, he was uncommonly judicious and instructive, and his ministrations were largely attended. As a Pastor, he was especially faithful and diligent. To great learning there were united in him meekness, prudence, diligence, knowledge of the world, and an affectionate superintendence of the interests, temporal and spiritual, of his flock. He so arranged his studies and other engagements in regard to time, that he had always some part of the afternoon to devote to visiting the families of his congregation. These visits were short, the conversation was serious, awakening, instructive and affectionate, and seldom did he leave a house without solemn prayer on behalf of its inmates. He did not consider any of his people's interests as beneath his notice, while his matured judgment and enlarged experience made him a wise counsellor and useful friend. On one occasion a lady, at whose house he called, in the spirit of a faithful Pastor, told him that she was sadly troubled by unworthy servants. "Ah, Madam," said he, "have you ever prayed to the Lord to provide worthy servants for you? Nothing which concerns our comfort is too minute for the care of our Heavenly Father."

* JOHN CUTHBERTSON was born in Scotland about the year 1720. He studied for the ministry probably under the Rev. John McMillan, the father and founder of the Reformed Presbytery of Scotland. He came to this country in 1752, and, for more than twenty years, was the only Reformed Presbyterian Minister in America. It is not quite certain whether he came hither on his own motion, prompted by his own missionary zeal, or by the formal appointment of the Reformed Presbytery. This Judicatory was constituted August 1, 1743, by two ministers, with their elders,—namely, Rev. Messrs. John McMillan and Thomas Nairn, and eight years afterwards (1752) the small Body was rent asunder by a dispute among its members regarding some doctrinal points. This was the very year of Mr. Cuthbertson's arrival in America; and the smallness of the Body, in its united state even, would have precluded the possibility of its lending him much aid in his mission. He seems to have established himself in Octorora, though, for twenty years, he had sole charge of the small Reformed Presbyterian Societies scattered over the Thirteen Colonies, and of course a very large portion of his time was spent in travelling. He entered cordially into the Union in 1782, and, until the close of his life, appears to have regularly attended the meetings of Synod. After the Union, his field of labour was restricted to his own immediate charge at Octorora, though he seems to have retained the habit, to some extent, of visiting many of the localities where Covenanters had settled. During the last visit of this sort that he made, some rumours got afloat prejudicial to his character for temperance, which were brought to the notice of Synod, by the Presbytery of New York. He had evidently acted indiscreetly, since his own Presbytery, after an investigation, administered a formal rebuke to him, and suspended him from the exercise of the ministry for four weeks. He died at Octorora, March 10, 1791.

On another occasion he met, in his pastoral charge, a difficulty which serious young persons often experience. A daughter of the excellent Mrs. Isabella Graham had wished to be connected with his church, but was afraid that her heart was not sufficiently engaged in the service of God. Her case was made known to him. With a peculiar kindness and solemnity of manner, he said,—“If the world, with all its wealth, pleasures and power were placed in one scale, and Christ alone in the other, which would your heart freely choose as its portion?” “Oh, Christ, Sir, Christ,” said she. “Come then,” said he, “and show this by professing Him before the world, trusting for the grace by which a weak faith may yet attain the full assurance.” She came; and of her and her sisters their mother afterwards said,—“I have reason to think the Lord ratified their surrender of themselves to Him.” Very similar was his faithful dealing with the late excellent Dr. Alexander Proudfit, in the character of a tender counsellor and friend. Just after graduating with much honour at Columbia College, New York, in 1792, and when somewhat excited with ambitious feelings and hopes, Mr. Proudfit called on Mr. Mason for advice in respect to his future course. In answer to an inquiry as to what profession he had chosen, Mr. Proudfit answered that he had not yet fully determined. Instantly, discerning the cause of his indecision, the venerable Pastor and friend replied,—“Alexander,—if you leave the service of Christ in the Ministry for the pursuit of worldly honours, He will raise up others to serve Him, but you may be lost.” Immediately this “word in season” was blessed; and, from that short interview, the young student went forth to become a man whom many have risen up to call blessed.

As a public man, Mr. Mason was greatly respected and honoured, and exerted an extensive and benign influence. From 1779 to 1785 he was a faithful and useful Trustee of the College of New Jersey, and in 1786 received from that institution the honorary degree of Doctor of Divinity. In the time of his country's need he also showed himself his country's friend. Leaving the comforts of home, during the occupancy of New York by the British army, in the War of the Revolution, and placing his family at Pluckemin, N. J., he willingly encountered the dangers and hardships of the camp, that he might, as a Chaplain, counsel and encourage the American troops in their struggle for liberty and for right. Nor was he less zealous for what he deemed ecclesiastical rights,—for when an attempt was made some years before, to set up, on the model of the Established Church of England, an Archbishopric, he drew a strong pen in opposition to the measure, and perhaps had as much to do as any other person in defeating it.

In his own family Dr. Mason was eminently faithful and happy. Much of his time was spent in devotional exercises. His children were regularly instructed in the Scriptures, the Psalms versified, and the Assembly's Catechism with proofs; and often did his distinguished son, the late Dr. John M. Mason, ascribe his own ability, which every one knew to be most remarkable, to quote extended and appropriate passages of Scripture, to the early training which he received from his venerable father. In his intercourse with his ministerial brethren, however they might belong to a different denomination from himself, he exhibited the most kind and fraternal spirit, and studied in every way to promote their interests. When, for instance, the first movement was made, about the year 1770, for having English preaching in the Reformed Dutch Churches in New

York, under the ministry of the Rev. Dr. Laidlie, a great excitement prevailed. Some forty or fifty families were so disturbed by this innovation upon their long established order, that they determined at once to leave the denomination. Accordingly, they waited upon Dr. Mason, and informed him of their wish to attach themselves to his charge. His congregation was at that time comparatively feeble, and such an accession would have been of the utmost consequence to him. Without, however, hesitating a moment, he calmly told them that he thought them acting under the influence of improper feelings,—that they had better return to their church; and if, after six months or a year, they found error preached, or that their souls were suffering for spiritual things, and that God, and not merely their passions, pointed them to such a change as they now proposed, he would then consider the request to be taken under his pastoral care. The majority of them returned. Dr. Laidlie prospered in his ministry, and on Dr. Mason and his flock came the blessing of the Peace-maker. Indeed, his heart warmed with Christian love; and his counsels and energies were always ready for any work that promised good. This was so peculiar that, when he died, his venerable and attached friend, the Rev. Dr. Rodgers, of New York, said,—“I feel as if I had lost my right arm.”

His labours were abundant,—often extending to distant places in his own and neighbouring States; and his ministerial services were attended with an unction which made them of a sweet savour to those who hungered and thirsted after righteousness. At length, however, the energies of nature gave way. After labouring nearly thirty years in his charge, his recollection suddenly failed him one day in the midst of his sermon, and he sat down in his pulpit, unable to proceed. Rising, in a few moments, he was enabled to say, in a peculiarly tender manner, that he considered this event as a call from his Heavenly Master to expect a speedy dismissal from earth, and then solemnly admonished them to be prepared for the will of God. It was a touching scene. His people loved him as a father, and were dissolved in tears. He thence passed to his house, and was shortly attacked with his last illness. Patient and self-possessed, through the grace which he loved to magnify, the scene of his departure was joyful and triumphant. His views of Christ, in his grace and in his glory, were rich and refreshing, and next to these he loved to dwell upon the beauty and power of brotherly love in the Church of God. Calling his daughter to his side, he requested her to write a letter which should be directed to each member of the Synod. That letter was short, but how rich in the spirit of Him who said, “Love one another!” It was this:

“Dear Brethren:—Farewell; be perfect, be of good comfort, be of one mind, live in peace, and the God of love and peace shall be with you.”

“Your dying brother,
“JOHN MASON.”

At length, on the 19th of April, 1792, he died; and his death, like his life, was an honourable testimony to his Redeemer's power and grace.

Dr. Mason was twice happily married; and, by both marriages, became connected with respectable Dutch families in New York. His first wife was Catharine Van Wyck, who became the mother of nine children, of whom only three lived to maturity. The eldest of these (*Helen*) became the wife of Matthew Duncan, a merchant in Philadelphia, and the mother of John M. Duncan, D.D., for many years Pastor of the Associate Reformed Church in Baltimore. The

second was the late *Dr. John M. Mason*, whose praise is in both hemispheres. The youngest (*Margaretta*) was married to the Hon. John Brown, one of the first Senators in Congress from Kentucky. Mrs. Mason died June 31, 1784. He was subsequently married to Sarah Van Alstine, who had no children, and survived him many years.

With much respect I am very truly yours,

JOHN B. DALES.

FROM MRS. JOANNA BETHUNE.

NEW YORK, June 26, 1849.

Reverend and dear Sir: In complying with your request for some account of my early friend and Pastor, Dr. Mason, I am forcibly reminded of God's word, Deuteronomy viii, 2: "And thou shalt remember all the way which the Lord thy God hath led thee these forty years in the wilderness, to humble thee and to prove thee, what was in thine heart, or whether thou wouldst keep his commandments or no."

My mother and family were introduced to the Rev. Dr. Mason, by the Rev. Mr. Ellis, of Paisley, in Scotland. He was the first to welcome us to a foreign land, and his kind attentions to the widow and the fatherless ceased only with his life. He was the first to persuade me publicly to acknowledge God as my Saviour and Redeemer. I was received into the communion of his church early in the year 1791. The next year I saw his remains consigned to the tomb, and ceased not to weep, and refused to be comforted, till his place was supplied by his distinguished son, the late Rev. Dr. John M. Mason.

Though more than half a century has elapsed since the death of the elder Dr. Mason, I have still a vivid recollection of his personal appearance and manner. He was of middle stature, not corpulent, had black hair, and a mild but penetrating black eye. He was distinguished for gentlemanly manners, staid deportment and decision of character. He was strict in his family discipline, uncommonly systematic in all his habits, and withal "given to hospitality." His sermons were thoroughly studied, his delivery was plain and energetic, and every thing, both in matter and manner, indicated a paramount regard to the glory of God and the salvation of souls. If an anecdote were admissible, the following might perhaps serve to illustrate his character more fully. A worthy Minister from Ireland, of somewhat eccentric habits and manner, travelled as a Missionary through the United States, and occasionally occupied Dr. Mason's pulpit. The good man was much annoyed at the fashionable style of the ladies' dress in those days, particularly their high head-dresses, and urged Dr. Mason to preach against them. "My dear Sir," replied the Doctor, "my business is more with the heart than the head. Looking to God to give effect to my preaching, I endeavour to convince my hearers that they are sinners, that they need a Saviour, and that they are bound to humble themselves before God, and give themselves wholly to his service. When this is effected, the head-dresses will come down of themselves."

I will only add the following brief notice of Dr. Mason's death, from a letter written by my beloved and venerated mother, Mrs. Isabella Graham, to a friend in Scotland:

"NEW YORK, April, 1792.—Sabbath noon.

"It is not my custom to take my pen on this day, even to write to a Christian friend, having occasion for my whole time with my family and with my God in secret; but I cannot go to dinner; I cannot eat; I cannot talk to my girls; my heart must bleed afresh upon the same altar where it has often been pierced. Oh, Madam, my dear Dr. Mason goes and leaves me here alone; in all probability, his course is nearly finished, and his crown awaits him. Five physicians now attend him closely. I have

seen him often, and he says.—‘All is well, and all *will be well*.’ Of the physicians he said,—‘Yes, yes, it is very well, they are useful men in God’s hands. They may be useful in patching up this tabernacle a little. If it be raised to usefulness, I am content. If not to usefulness, I do not desire it. I feel no concern about the issue of this : the will of the Lord be done.’

“Sabbath Evening.—I have again seen my dear Pastor, and discern the clay dissolving fast. The words of dying saints are precious ; and his are few. He thus accosted me :—‘I am just awaiting the will of God ; for the present, I seem a useless blank in his hand ; I can say very little ; be not too anxious for my life, but transfer your care to the Church ; my life or death is but a trifle ; if the Lord have any use for me, it is easy for Him to raise me up still ; and if He do, it will be agreeable to observe his hand distinct from men ; if He should not, you will all be cared for ; leave all to Him and seek his glory.’ He could say no more, nor will I to-night, but address myself to our Lord on his behalf, yours, my own and our dear concerns.

“April 23, Monday.—It is finished. My dear Minister’s dying scene is over. On Thursday, the 19th of this month, a quarter before ten o’clock, A. M., the Lord received his spirit and laid his weary flesh to rest. He had a sore conflict with the king of terrors, who seemed allowed to revel through every part of his mortal frame. His legs were mortified to his knees. He had not been able to lie down for four weeks, and died in his chair. Like his Master, he groaned, but never complained. He had a draught of his Master’s cup ; but the bitter ingredient, *desertion*, made no part of it. I had the honour to close his eyes, and to shut those dear lips from whence so many precious truths have proceeded, and to mix with the ministering spirits who attended to hail the release. * * * This is a great work finished. Dr. Mason was a city set on a hill. He was with the army during all the War, after the evacuation of New York ; had great influence over the soldiers ; preached the Gospel of peace uniformly, but never meddled with politics, though he was fully capable. In every situation the Lord supported him in uniformity and consistency of character ; and carried him through without a single spot or stain.”

I have written under great infirmity, being now in my eightieth year ; and I only regret that you have not found one more capable than myself of performing the service you have asked of me.

Wishing you success in all your labours of love,

I remain, Reverend Sir,

Yours, with Christian respect and regard,

JOANNA BETHUNE

ROBERT ANNAN.*

1761—1819.

ROBERT ANNAN, a son of Robert Annan (his mother’s maiden name was Landales) was born in the town of Cupar, Fife, Scotland, in the year 1742. Of his early history nothing definite can now be ascertained. After pursuing the usual course at the University of St. Andrews, he commenced the study of Theology under the venerable Alexander Moncrieff, one of the original Seeders. Among his fellow-students were Messrs. John Mason and James Proudfit, who afterwards became fellow-labourers with him in this country. He was licensed by the Associate Presbytery of Perth, when only about nineteen years old, and was, shortly after, appointed by the Synod to visit the American Colonies in the capacity of a Missionary. He was little inclined to accept the appointment, but it seems to have been scarcely at his option whether or not to do so, as the Synod, from their earnest desire to supply the waste places of the New World,

* Christian Instructor, 1845.—MS. from Samuel Annan, M.D.