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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.
✓
BY WILLIAM B. SPRAGUE, D. D.

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yet, without the least apparent difficulty or hesitation, he would retract an opinion on full conviction of its being a mistake. I have never known one who appeared to lay himself more fully open to the reception of truth, from whatever quarter it came, than he; for he judged the knowledge of truth only to be real learning, and that endeavouring to defend an error was but labouring to be more ignorant. But, until fully convinced, he was becomingly tenacious of his opinion.

"The unavoidable consciousness of native power made him bold and enterprising. Yet the event proved that his boldness arose, not from a partial, groundless, self-conceit, but from true self-knowledge. Upon fair and candid trial, faithful and just to himself, he judged what he could do; and what he could, when called to it, he attempted; and what he attempted he accomplished.

CALEB SMITH.*

1747—1762.

CALEB SMITH, a son of William and Hannah (Sears) Smith, was born at Brookhaven, L. I., December 29, O. S., 1723. The family was one of considerable wealth, and of high respectability.

As he discovered, from early childhood, more than common vigour of mind, and love of learning, his father resolved on giving him a collegiate education; and accordingly placed him at a grammar school, where he made such improvements that, in 1739, in his fifteenth year, he became a member of Yale College. His standing, during his whole college course, was highly respectable, and he graduated, an excellent scholar, in 1743. He remained at College, for some time, as a resident graduate.

During the second year that he was in College, there was a very general attention to religion among the students, in which he also had a share. From that time, his mind seems to have been permanently and habitually directed to his religious interests; though he looked with no little distrust upon his own exercises, on account of their having been less distinct and vivid than he supposed was necessary to give them the stamp of genuineness. To others, however, the evidence of his piety was very satisfactory; and several clergymen, to whom he communicated his religious views and feelings, had no hesitation in expressing the opinion that his conversion was radical, and that he ought to direct his attention to the Christian ministry.

In 1746, about the time he took his second degree, Mr. Burr of Newark, afterwards President of New Jersey College, applied to him to assist him in the instruction of a large Latin school, of which he had the charge; but Mr. Smith's engagements did not allow him to go to Newark till Mr. Burr was otherwise supplied. However, he went some time after to Elizabethtown, where he instructed several young men in the languages, while he pursued the study of Theology under the direction of the Rev. Jonathan Dickinson. At length, by the advice of Mr. Dickinson and some other ministers, he presented himself before the Presbytery of New York as a candidate for the ministry; and, having creditably gone through his several trials, was licensed to preach in April, 1747.

His preaching, from the beginning, was more than commonly acceptable; and, within about a year from his licensure, he received several unanimous

* A Brief Account of his Life.—Stearns' Hist. First Ch., Newark.

calls from different places to settle in the ministry. He requested the Presbytery to decide which call he should accept; but, as they chose to refer the matter to his own judgment, he decided in favour of Newark Mountains, (now Orange); and was accordingly ordained and installed there, November 30, 1748.

Though Mr. Smith evidently laboured with great diligence, and in a spirit of most intense devotion, his ministry was not signalized by any extraordinary immediate results. It was, however, during a period of uncommon religious apathy in the country at large, that he exercised his ministry; so that, even among men of his own views and spirit, he was not singular in not being permitted to witness an extensive revival of religion in connection with his labours. It seems to have been a source of constant uneasiness and grief to him, that his success was so limited; and yet there were a goodly number who connected their hopeful conversion with his instrumentality.

But Mr. Smith's usefulness was by no means confined to his own immediate congregation. In 1750, shortly after his settlement in the ministry, he was appointed a Trustee of the College of New Jersey, and exerted an important influence in aid of the interests of that infant Seminary. He was also early chosen Clerk of the Board of Trustees, and continued in that office till the removal of the College to Princeton. After the death of President Edwards, he was chosen President *pro tempore*, and for several months occupied that important station with much dignity and ability.

He was an active and useful member of the ecclesiastical bodies with which he was connected. He not only judged correctly but spoke well. He was, for many years, Stated Clerk of the Presbytery, and usually conducted its correspondence, especially in regard to all matters of peculiar delicacy or difficulty. He had a happy talent at reconciling differences—at preventing threatened disruptions, and restoring harmony where it had been temporarily interrupted.

Mr. Smith ranked among the more popular preachers of his day. In the early part of his ministry, he wrote his sermons out with great care; but, in the latter part of it, a large portion of his preaching was extemporaneous, so far as the language was concerned, though he never failed carefully to consider and digest his subject. His voice was clear and pleasant, though somewhat monotonous; and his manner in the pulpit was affectionate and fervent, without any of the show of oratory. He became, at one period, the subject of violent nervous and vertiginous affections, which occasioned him serious embarrassment in his public services, and sometimes even obliged him to support himself by holding to the pulpit. The only Sermon he ever published, was one on the death of President Burr, which is said to have been written at a peculiarly inauspicious moment, and to have been but a poor sample of his ordinary preaching. It is, however, a very respectable performance.

In the beginning of October, 1762, he was seized with a dysentery, which proved the means of terminating his life. In the early part of his illness, his mind, though not greatly clouded, was not entirely free from anxious thoughts; but, at a later period, he obtained a degree of confidence in the merits and the promises of his Redeemer, that cast out all fear, and put him in possession of a serene and triumphant joy. His people evinced

their warm attachment to him, and their interest in the preservation of his life, by observing the Tuesday preceding his death as a day of fasting and prayer; on which occasion, they called in the assistance of several of the neighbouring ministers, to one of whom he expressed an undoubting assurance that he should soon be mingling in the praises and enjoyments of Heaven. On the Friday morning following, at a very early hour, perceiving that the closing scene had come, he gathered his family around him, and took his final leave of them, commending them in fervent prayer to the providence and grace of God. After this, he requested that his little son should be brought and laid in his arms; and, as he was too weak to be able to lift his arm, he desired some one to raise it and lay it over the child; which being done, he very affectionately invoked the Divine blessing upon him. He expired about six o'clock, the same morning, (October 20, 1762,) aged thirty-eight years and ten months.

His funeral was attended, on the Sabbath following, by a large concourse of people, among whom were a number of ministers. In the morning, one of the ministers preached from Philippians i, 21; in the afternoon, another preached from Ezekiel xxii, 30.

In September, 1748, Mr. Smith was married to Martha, youngest daughter of the Rev. Jonathan Dickinson of Elizabethtown,—a lady whose character is thus described by one of her contemporaries:—"She was superior to most of her sex in strength of genius; her intellectual powers were quick and penetrating; she had a thirst for knowledge, and was greatly delighted in reading. Kindness, care, and friendship, composed her natural temper: she was an agreeable companion, very obliging in her behaviour, and admired and loved by all who had the happiness of her acquaintance. As she was blessed with an early religious education, so the things of eternity began betimes to exercise her: she had serious impressions upon her mind even from her childhood, and began a course of secret prayer while young. And, although she was subject to melancholy at seasons, and consequently to fears and doubts about her spiritual state, yet, towards the latter part of her life, she had much greater satisfaction." With this excellent lady Mr. Smith lived nearly eight years, when, after a lingering disease of about a year, she was taken from him, in August, 1757, at the age of thirty-one,—leaving three children, all of them daughters. A little more than two years after this bereavement,—in October, 1759, he was married to Rebecca, daughter of the "Honourable Major" Foote of Branford, Conn. She is spoken of as having been "endowed with many agreeable virtues to render her an amiable companion;" but the fact that she was still living, when this reference to her character was made, was doubtless the reason why nothing more remains concerning her than this passing allusion. He had one son by his last marriage,—the child above referred to, as being lifted into his father's arms to receive his dying benediction. The descendants of Mr. Smith are among the most respectable people in New Jersey, one of whom is the Hon. Henry W. Green, the present (1849) Chief Justice of the State.

The only extended notice of Mr. Smith that remains, is a pamphlet of about sixty pages, printed at Woodbridge, N. J., in 1763, entitled "A Brief Account of the life of the late Rev. Caleb Smith, A. M., minister of the Gospel at Newark Mountains, who died October 22, 1762; chiefly

extracted from his diary and other private papers. Heb. vi. 11, 12." The pamphlet contains comparatively few facts, being chiefly occupied with the record of his private religious exercises, evincing a remarkable degree of spirituality and devotion.

JOHN BRAINERD.*

1747—1781.

JOHN BRAINERD, a son of the Hon. Hezekiah and Dorothy (Mason) Brainerd, was born at Haddam, Conn., February 28, 1719–20. He was probably fitted for College by his brother, the Rev. Nehemiah Brainerd† of Eastbury, a parish in the town of Glastenbury. He was graduated at Yale College in 1746. During his collegiate course, his brother David, in his letters, warned him against that spurious religious experience that is too often found in connection with great religious excitements. But when he supposed himself to be converted, or when he made a public profession of religion, or with what church he originally connected himself, cannot now be ascertained. Probably his first membership was with the church in his native place; but, as the Records of that church at the period referred to are lost, nothing beyond conjecture is now attainable. It would seem, however, that he must have had the ministry in view during his college course; for within a few months after his graduation, he had commenced preaching, and was actually engaged as a missionary among the Indians.

The following letter, covering a considerable part of John Brainerd's missionary life, was addressed by him to Mrs. Elizabeth Smith, the wife of the Hon. William Smith, and previously the wife of Colonel Elisha Williams, once Rector of Yale College. It has never before been published, and doubtless contains the fullest, as well as most authentic, narrative of his self-denying labours, that is now extant.

BROTHERTON in New Jersey, August 24, 1761.

Madam: According to my promise, I here send a particular account of the Indian mission in this Province, which, for some years, has been the object of my care. I shall take a brief view of it from its first rise and foundation.

In 1743, my brother and predecessor, Mr. David Brainerd, being employed by the Corresponding members of the Honourable Society in Scotland for propagating Christian Knowledge, entered on the arduous business of Christianizing the Indians, and for that end, on the 1st of April, arrived at Kaunaameek, an Indian settlement about twenty miles from Stockbridge Northwest. At this place he continued about the space of a year; and having so far gained upon these Indians as that he could persuade them to move to Stockbridge, and settle themselves under the ministry of the Rev. Mr. Sergeant, he, by the direction of the Correspondents, removed

* MS. from Rev. Dr. Field.—Allen's Biog. Dict.—Webster's MSS.

† NEHEMIAH BRAINERD was a native of Haddam; was graduated at Yale College in 1732; was ordained pastor of the Second Congregational Church in Glastenbury, (Eastbury) Conn., in April, 1740; and died November 9, 1742.