

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCHES

OF THE

FOUNDER, AND PRINCIPAL ALUMNI

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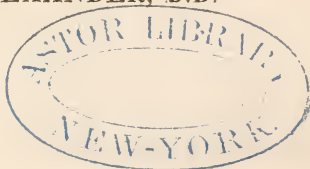
LOG COLLEGE.

TOGETHER WITH AN ACCOUNT OF THE REVIVALS
OF RELIGION, UNDER THEIR MINISTRY.

COLLECTED AND EDITED

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CHAPTER IX.

REV. WM. TENNENT'S LETTER.

The Rev. William Tennent's Letter, to the Rev. Mr. Prince, of Boston, giving the character of the revival in Freehold, N. J.

The following letter is introduced here, because it gives an account of the fruits of the ministry of the Rev. John Tennent. It is given literally from Prince's Christian History.

“FREEHOLD, *October 11th, 1744.*

“REV. AND DEAR SIR,

“I desire to notice thankfully the late rich display of our glorious Emanuel's grace, in subduing by his word and Spirit, multitudes of sinners to himself, both in this and other lands. O may he go on ‘conquering and to conquer,’ until he has subdued all things unto himself! Neither can I think but that the writing of a history of the great things our Lord has done among us, has a tendency to, and will by the blessing of God upon it, excite generations yet unborn to praise his glorious name, and thereby his honour will be advanced, and his triumphs increased! Most gladly, therefore, do I comply with

your request, and herewith send such an account as I can, of what the Lord has done among us. But herein, as I must be very general, having never made any memorandums in writing of the Lord's work here, so I trust I shall be strictly true, for the Lord hates a false witness.

“This place lies southwest from New York, and is distant from it about fifty miles. It was the first, in the East Jersey, on the west side of the Raritan River, which was settled with a gospel ministry. This was owing, under God, to the agency of some Scotch people, that came to it; among whom there was none so painful in this blessed undertaking, as one Walter Ker, who in the year 1685, for his faithful and conscientious adherence to God and his truth, as professed by the Church of Scotland, was there apprehended, and sent into this country, under a sentence of perpetual banishment. By which it appears, that the devil and his instruments lost their aim in sending him from home; where it is unlikely he could ever have been so serviceable to Christ's kingdom as he has been here. He is yet alive; and blessed be God, he is flourishing in his old age, being in his 88th year.

“But to return; the public means of grace dispensed here, were at first, for a season, too much like a miscarrying womb and dry breasts; so that the major part of the congregation could not be said to have so much as a name to live. Family prayer

was unpractised by all, a very few excepted ; ignorance so overshadowed their minds, that the doctrine of the new birth when clearly explained and powerfully pressed upon them, as absolutely necessary to salvation (by that faithful preacher of God's word, Mr. Theodorus Jacobus Frelinghuysen, a Low Dutch minister, and some other English ministers who were occasionally here,) was made a common game of ; so that not only the preachers, but professors of that truth, were called in derision *new-born*, and looked upon as holders forth of some new and false doctrine. And, indeed, their practice was as bad as their principles, viz. loose and profane.

“In the year 1729, their minister removed from them, and they were so grievously divided among themselves, that it appeared improbable they would ever agree in the settlement of another. In this miserable, helpless, and almost hopeless condition, they lay, and few among them had either eyes to see, or hearts to bewail their woful, wretched circumstances. Thus they seemed to be cast out, as the prophet Ezekiel represents it in the 16th chapter of his book, and the 5th verse. But the Lord who is rich in mercy, of his unexpected and unmerited love, passed by them lying in their blood, and said unto many of them since that day, *Live* ; and live they shall to all eternity.

“About this time, my dear brother John (who is now with Jesus) was licensed as a candidate for

the sacred ministry : a youth, whom the Author of every good gift had uncommonly furnished for that important trust. To him application was made by some of the congregation, intreating that he would supply them for a time ; to which, with the leave of the presbytery, he consented. But ere he went, he often told me, that he was heartily sorry he had engaged to go among them ; for it seemed to him that they were a people whom God had given up for their abuse of the gospel. But the Lord's thoughts are not our thoughts, nor his ways our ways ; for when he had preached four or five Sabbaths in the place, which was the whole time he tarried among them at first, the Lord so blessed his labours, engaging people to attend to the things which were spoken, and in stirring them up to search the scriptures whether these things were so or not, and withal enabling him to preach to them with such uncommon freedom and earnestness, that he told me he was fully persuaded Christ Jesus had a large harvest to bring home there ; so that, though they were a poor broken people, yet if they called him he would settle among them, albeit he should be put to beg his bread by so doing. April the 15th, 1730, the congregation unanimously called him ; which he accepting of, was ordained the 19th of November following, and continued with them until April 23d, 1732, and was then translated to glory.

“During his short time, his labours were greatly blessed; so that the place of public worship was usually crowded with people of all ranks and orders, as well as professions, that obtained in that part of the country, and they seemed to hear, generally, as for their lives: yea, such as were wont to go to those places for their diversion, viz. to hear news or speak to their tradesmen, &c., even on the Lord’s day, as they themselves have since confessed, were taken in the gospel net. A solemn awe of God’s majesty possessed many, so that they behaved themselves as at his bar, while in his house. Many tears were usually shed when he preached, and sometimes the body of the congregation was moved or affected. I can say, and let the Lord alone have the glory of it, that I have seen both minister and people wet with their tears, as with a bedewing rain. It was no uncommon thing to see persons in the time of hearing, sobbing as if their hearts would break, but without any public outcry; and some have been carried out of the assembly (being overcome) as if they had been dead.

“Religion was then the general subject of discourse, though they did not all approve of the power of it. The holy Bible was searched by people on both sides of the question, and knowledge surprisingly increased. The terror of God fell generally upon the inhabitants of this place; so that wickedness as ashamed in a great measure hid itself; fro-

icking, dancing, horse-racing, with other profane meetings were broken up. Some of the jolly companions of both sexes, were constrained by their consciences to meet together, the men by themselves, and the women by themselves, to confess privately their abominations before God, and beg the pardon of them.

“Before my brother’s death, by reason of his bodily weakness, and inability on that account to officiate publicly, I preached here about six months. In which time, many came inquiring what they should do to be saved, and some to tell what the Lord had done for their souls. But the blessing on his labours to the conviction and conversion of souls, was more discernible some months after his death, than any time in his life ; almost in every neighbourhood—I cannot say in every house—there were sin-sick souls, longing for and seeking after the dear physician, Jesus Christ : several of whom, I no ways doubt have, since that time, sincerely closed with him, and are healed ; glory, glory to his holy name be given, for ever and ever, Amen !

“Sometime after my brother’s decease, the congregation called me to labour among them, statedly ; which I accepted, and was ordained, October the 25th, 1733. Thus my Lord sent me to reap that on which I had bestowed but little labour. May this consideration be blessed to make me thankful and humble, while I live.

“I must further declare to the honour of God, that he has not yet left us, although awfully provoked by our crying crimes; but ever since that more remarkable outpouring of his Spirit has continued to bless his own ordinances, to the conviction, conversion and consolation, of precious souls: so that every year, some, more or less have been in a judgment of charity added (savingly,) to his mystical body: to his holy name be all the glory. In the mean time, I would have it observed, that two or three years last past, have afforded fewer instances of this kind, than formerly. However, through grace some have been lately awakened who are even now seeking Jesus sorrowing. What the number is of those who have tasted the sweet fruits of the Redeemer's purchase in a saving manner, in this congregation, I cannot tell: it is my comfort that the Lord will reckon them; for he knows who are his: and indeed none but the omniscient God is equal to the difficult province of determining certainly concerning the internal states of men. Yet I may be bold to say, that to all appearance, both old and young, males and females, have been renewed; though none so young as I have heard of in some other places. Some negroes, I trust, are made free in Christ; and more seem to be unfeignedly seeking after it. But after all that the Lord has been pleased to do among us, I am persuaded that the greater number, by far, are yet in the gall

of bitterness and bond of iniquity. This makes me sometimes ready to wish, that I had in the wilderness the lodging-place of a wayfaring-man, that I might leave my people and go from them; or rather that my head were waters, and mine eyes a fountain of tears, that I might weep day and night for them! Such as have been converted were every one of them prepared for it by a sharp law-work of conviction, discovering to them in a heart-affecting manner, their sinfulness both by nature and practise, as well as their liableness to damnation for their original and actual transgressions. Neither could they see any way in themselves by which they could escape the divine vengeance; for that their whole life past, was not only a continued act of rebellion against God, but their present endeavours to better it, such as prayers, &c. were so imperfect, that they could not endure them, and much less, they concluded, would a holy God. They all confessed the justice of God in their eternal perdition; and thus have been shut up to the blessed necessity of seeking relief by faith in Christ alone. It would be endless to mention the evils they complained of; viz. ignorance, unbelief, hardness of heart, hatred against God, his laws, and people worldliness, wandering of heart in duty, pride, sensuality, sloth, &c. With what grief, shame and self-loathing have I heard them bewail their loss of time, and neglect of the great gospel salvation. Those

that were communicants before their awakening, have with trembling declared that their unworthy partaking grieved them more than anything ever they did ; for hereby they had as it were murdered the Lord. It is almost incredible to relate, the indignation that such awakened sinners expressed against themselves, on the account of their sinfulness. They looked upon themselves to be mere monsters of nature, and that none were worse if any so bad. Others signified that they could not find their pictures out of hell, and that they were just fit companions for the damned, and none else. Let it be here noted, that some who have expressed themselves in the manner I have mentioned, were before taken for believers both by themselves and others, being sober and regular in their walk.

“The sorrows of the convinced, were not all alike, either in degree or continuance. Some have not thought it possible for them to be saved, if God would vindicate the honour of his justice ; but these thoughts continued not long at a time, blessed be God. Others thought it was possible, but not very probable, because of their vileness. The greatest degree of hope which any had, under a conviction that issued well, was a maybe ; ‘peradventure, or maybe, God will have mercy on me,’ said the sinner. Some, in coming to Jesus, have been much rent with blasphemous and other horrible temptations, which have turned their moisture

into the drought of summer; who now through pure grace serve God, without such distractions, in gladness and singleness of heart. The conviction of some has been instantaneous; by the Holy Spirit's applying the law to the conscience, and discovering to the eye of the understanding, as it were, all their heart deceits very speedily; by which they have been stabbed as with a sword. But the conviction of others, has been in a more progressive way. They have had discovered to them, one abomination after another, in life; and from thence were led to behold the fountain of all corruption in the heart; and thus they were constrained to despair of life by the law, and consequently to flee to Jesus as the only door of hope, and so rest entirely on his merit for salvation.

“After the aforesaid sorrowful exercises, such as were reconciled to God have been blessed with the Spirit of adoption, enabling them to cry, Abba, Father. But some have had greater degrees of consolation than others, in proportion to the clearness of the evidences of their sonship. The Lord has drawn some out of the horrible pit of distress and darkness, and brought them into the light of his countenance. He has filled their hearts with joy, and their mouths with praises; yea, given them the full assurance of faith. Others have been brought to peace in believing; but have not had so great a *plerophory* of joy; yet they go on in a religious

course, trusting in the Lord. The way they have been comforted is either by the application of some particular promise of holy scripture, or by a soul-affecting view of the way of salvation by Christ, as free, without money and without price. They were enabled to behold the valuable mercies of the covenant of grace, freely tendered to the vilest transgressors, that were poor in their own eyes, sin-sick, weary and wounded, together with the ability and willingness of the Lord Jesus to relieve them from all the evils, they either feared or felt. With this way of salvation their souls were well pleased, and thereupon, have ventured their case into his hands, expecting help from him only ; who has given them both peace and rest ; yea, filled some of them with joy unspeakable and full of glory. I remember not of any that received their first comforts otherwise. Some few have retained their confidence in God ever since, without any considerable questionings of their state, although they have not always tasted the comforts of it. But the most, by far, have questioned all, and doubted it was a delusion. This I suppose is generally owing to the remains of corruption, which blot the evidences of grace in good men, so that they can hardly read them ; and particularly, to the awful sin of unbelief ; together with the prevalence of a legal spirit, which presses them to perfect holiness on pain of death, and because they cannot

obtain that, they conclude they are unsanctified, and have no right to Christ. I might add the ignorance of mortification ; they seem to think that in the justified, sin is killed in its being, as well as governing power ; and, therefore, because they feel their old sins sometimes stirring in them, they conclude that all is wrong ; nay, although they hate the doctrine of perfection as held by some, yet because they are not perfect they think they have no grace. But however distressing it is to them to feel their imperfections, it helps to persuade me that they are regenerate ; else it would not be so ; sin would not be their chief burden, in a general way.

“However, our Lord who comforts those that are cast down, even the wonderful Counsellor, teaches them, that he not only saves those who have been sinners before conversion, but even such as after it, find a law in their members warring against the law of their minds, which too often causes them to do the things they would not ; and enables them to reflect upon what they have and do daily experience, and compare it with the evidences of grace in the word of God. The blessed God does likewise give them renewed tastes of his love, even after missteps ; and thus they are established in faith and hope, so that they have a prevailing persuasion of their interest in Christ ; except it be in times of desertion and temptation, with which some are more

exercised than others, for reasons best known to a sovereign God.

“Doubtless, Sir, you will desire to know, what effects this work produces on the minds and manners of its subjects. I answer, they are not only made to know, but heartily to approve of the great doctrines of the gospel, which they were before either ignorant of or averse to, (at least some of them) so that they do harmonize sweetly in exalting free, special, and sovereign grace, through the Redeemer Jesus Christ; being willing to glory only in the Lord, who has loved them and given himself for them, an offering and a sacrifice of a sweet-smelling savour.

“I cannot express, with what satisfaction I have heard them speak of the new covenant method of salvation. They have spoken with such affection and clearness, as I have thought was sufficient to convince an atheist, that the Lord was their Teacher. The alteration in some, from almost gross ignorance to such clear gospel light, and in others from such corrupt principles, as the Papists and Quakers hold, to the believing acknowledgment of the truth, none but he that made the understanding could effect. They approve of the law of God after the inward man, as holy, just, and good, and prize it above gold, yea, much fine gold. They judge it their duty as well as privilege to wait on God in all the ordinances of his own institution, although they expect to merit nothing thereby. A reverence for God's command-

ing authority, and gratitude for his love, conspire to incite and constrain them, to a willing, unfeigned, universal and unfainting obedience to his laws : yet they declare that in everything they come sadly short of what they ought to do, and bitterly bewail their defects. But blessed be God, they are not discouraged in their endeavours to reach forward, if by any means they may apprehend that for which they are apprehended of God ; and in all things they acknowledge that they ought to look to Jesus as the author and finisher of faith, whose alone it is to work all good in them and for them, to whom be glory for ever. They are not unmolested in their way by enemies, both from within and from without. Yet, they profess that the comforts which they receive do more than compensate all their labour, were there no good to be expected hereafter : and surely, as the psalmist observes, ‘in keeping God’s commands there is a great reward.’ But to proceed :

“ They have not all made alike proficiency in the Christian course ; neither are they all equal in religious endeavours ; nor any at all times alike lively. They are sometimes obstructed in their religious progress by coldness and deadness ; but this the blessed Jesus removes at times, by the influence of his Holy Spirit ; then, O then, their hearts are enlarged, and they run the sweet way of God’s commandments with alacrity and delight, they love all such as they have reason to think, from their

principles, experience, and practice, are truly godly, though they differ from them in sentiment in lesser things, and look on them to be the excellent of the earth. They rejoice in Zion's prosperity ; glorifying God on that account, and feel a sympathy in her sorrows. They do prefer one another before themselves, in love ; except, under temptation, which they are ready to confess and bewail, when they are themselves ; generally accounting that they are the meanest of the family of God, and unworthy of the blessing ; yea, the most so of any living, all things considered. In a word, the sapless formalist is become spiritual in his conversation ; the proud and haughty are made humble and affable ; the wanton and vile, sober and temperate ; the swearer honours that venerable name he was wont to profane, and blesses, instead of cursing ; the Sabbath-breaker is brought to be a strict observer of holy time ; the worldling now seeks treasures in the heavens ; the extortioner now deals justly ; and the formerly malicious, forgive injuries ; the prayerless are earnest and incessant in acts of devotion ; and the sneaking self-seeker, endeavours the advancement of God's glory, and the salvation of immortal souls.

“Through God's mercy we have been quite free from enthusiasm ; our people have followed the holy law of God, the sure word of prophecy, and not the impulses of their own minds. There have not been that I know of, among us, any visions, except

such as are by faith, namely, clear and affecting views of the new and living way to the Father through his dear Son Jesus Christ : nor any revelations but what have been long since written in the sacred volume : nor any trances but such as all men now living shall meet with, for it is appointed for all men once to die.

“It may not be amiss to inform you, that many who have been awakened, and seemed for a time to set out for Zion, are turned back. Yea, of those who have been esteemed converts, some have made shipwreck of faith and a good conscience ; though, glory to God, there have not been many such ; yet some of them who have thus awfully apostatized, were highly esteemed in the church. By this, our good and gracious God has given check to too high an esteem of our own judgment, concerning the spiritual states of others, (an evil which is too common among young converts) and awfully warned all that stand, to take heed lest they fall. Many, I have cause to fear, have been hardened in their impieties and unreasonable prejudices against vital religion, by the backslidings of some professors. ‘Wo to the world, because of offences!’ But in the mean time, blessed be God, Wisdom is and will be justified of her children.

“This, Sir, is as particular an account, as I can at present give of the Lord’s work, in this place. If my Lord will accept it as a testimony for him, it

will be a greater honour than ever I deserved. I need your prayers, and earnestly desire them. O beg of God, that I may be faithful to the death, and wise to win souls. I am with all due respects, yours in the dearest Jesus,

WM. TENNENT."

"ATTESTATION *to the preceding Account by the Ruling Elders and Deacons of the Congregation of Freehold.*

"We the subscribers, Ruling Elders and Deacons of the Presbyterian congregation of Freehold, having had perfect knowledge of the circumstances of this place, some of us from the first settling of it, and others of a long time, do give our testimony to the truth in general, of the above letter of our Rev. pastor. May the Lord make the same of use for the carrying on his glorious work begun in these lands, and make the name of the dearest Jesus glorious from the rising to the setting sun.

WALTER KER,	ROBERT CUMMING,
DAVID RHEA,	JOHN HENDERSON,
WILLIAM KER,	SAMUEL KER.

Freehold, in New Jersey, October 11th, 1744."