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Rev. Nathaniel Irwin.

BY REV. D. K. TURNER, HARTSVILLE, PA.

(Buckingham Meeting, October 23, 1883.)

The Neshaminy Presbyterian church in Warwick had enjoyed the ministry of two able and distinguished men, William Tennent and Charles Beatty, in their successive pastorates, a period of almost half a century, when the pulpit became vacant by the death of the latter, which occurred in 1772, in the island of Barbadoes, one of the West Indies, whither he had gone in company with James Witherspoon, son of Dr. John Witherspoon, president of Princeton College, to solicit contributions for that institution. Mr. Beatty during his ministerial life had been frequently absent from home months at a time, and on one occasion for more than a year, being employed as chaplain in the regiments of troops raised for the defence of the frontier against the French and Indians, and as an agent of the synod of the Presbyterian church, visiting Great Britain to secure money for the widow's and missionary fund. No doubt the religious interests of the congregation had suffered somewhat from these repeated instances of the suspension of his labors within its bounds, and when his decease in a far country removed him altogether from the scene of his earthly toils, the people felt that a new and heavy load of sorrow was laid upon them. They could not at once fix upon a successor in the sacred office, and more than a year and a half elapsed before they extended an invitation to Rev. Nathaniel Irwin a young man 27 years of age to succeed him.

Mr. Irwin was born at Fagg's Manor, Chester county, November 18, 1746. He had graduated at Princeton, in 1770. While there he was associated with students some of whom became eminent in the history of our country for talents, learning and influence, and rose to commanding positions in the state and the church. Among them may be mentioned James Madison, the fourth president of the United States, and the only president of the Union who ever received the degree of Bachelor of Arts from

that college; Samuel Stanhope Smith, afterwards president of the College of New Jersey, at Princeton; William Bradford, who became one of the justices of the Supreme Court of Pennsylvania, and attorney-general of the United States under President Washington; General John Beatty, oldest son of Rev. Charles Beatty, and member of the Continental and Federal Congresses; John Henry, governor of Maryland, and member of the House of Representatives and Senate of the United States; Caleb Wallace, chief justice of Kentucky; Gunning Bedford, a member of the convention which framed the constitution of the United States, and also a judge of the District Court of the United States; Hugh H. Brackenridge, a judge of the Supreme Court of Pennsylvania, and Philip Freneau, a patriotic poet in our Revolutionary war. With these and kindred spirits he united in the organization of the American Whig Society, June 24, 1769, in an upper room of Nassau Hall. It was established to cultivate the art of public speaking, and to discuss those great questions in respect to civil and political rights, which were then rising into prominence on account of British tyranny toward the Colonies. They were all true and earnest patriots, and no doubt their minds were roused to a deeper sense of the injustice of the mother country by the investigations and debates, to which they were accustomed in that youthful conclave. The society was evidently required by the wants of the young men, for it exists in a flourishing condition at the present day, and has numbered among its members some of the most able men that have adorned the history of our nation. What the standing of Mr. Irwin in college was we have no means of knowing after so long an interval of time, but we can well believe, considering his talents and character, that he did not misimprove his opportunities. Either before or after his graduation (probably after) he taught an academy at Princeton, and at the same time pursued the study of theology. Very likely his researches in sacred themes were under the direction of Dr. John Witherspoon, then president of the college, who was subsequently in the Continental Congress, and one of the signers of the Declaration of Independence. There were no theological seminaries in those days, and it was customary for young men, who wished to become preachers of

the gospel, to prepare for their work under the oversight and in the family of some earnest minister. He was licensed to preach by the Presbytery of New Castle, in the last part of 1772, or early in 1773, and, it is probable this took place at the same time that Samuel Stanhope Smith was licensed, for he received his licensure from the same Presbytery within the same year. Those two young men were intimately associated in their college life, and it would be natural for them to wish to pass the ordeal of a theological examination together. Some time after this he was sent out by the synod into central Pennsylvania and Virginia to labor in the destitute settlements, where population was sparse and religious privileges few. How long a period he was engaged in this work we are not informed, but it must have been longer than the terms of several others, who were commissioned for similar labors, as he received more compensation than any one else, whose name is mentioned in the minutes of synod, as employed in 1774 in missionary tours. The treasurer of synod was directed to pay him nine pounds, nine shillings and three pence, in Pennsylvania currency about \$25.25, nearly three times as much as any other youthful licentiate received. He was occupied in this self-denying toil perhaps four or five months, as the synod at the same session appointed Ebenezer Brooks to supply in Virginia five months, Mr. Debow nine months in Carolina, and three others each six months in Pennsylvania and Virginia. The synod was much interested, even at that early day, in the religious welfare of the thinly settled portions of the country, and took all means in its power to provide for them needed instruction in sacred things.

Soon after his return to the vicinity of Philadelphia he received an invitation to preach in the church at Neshaminy as a candidate for settlement as pastor. Accepting the summons as a favorable opening for labor he repaired to the congregation with little but his horse and his Bible. His father was not wealthy; he had been compelled to teach during the progress of his studies in order to obtain means to continue in college, and now his funds were at a low ebb. But he was endowed with a bright, intelligent countenance; a clear, piercing eye; a tall, commanding form, and a strong, loud voice. His manner in the

pulpit was solemn, animated and earnest, and in social life he was lively and agreeable. The people were so pleased with his discourse and his conversation that they soon gave him a call to abide with them as their religious guide. Though this was done in the spring he was not ordained and installed pastor until November 3, 1774. In the church records it is stated, "He is to have for a yearly support in his ministry from said congregation the sum of £140, until said congregation provide a parsonage for Mr. Irwin, and after a parsonage is provided, ye sum of £100 yearly." The manse was not purchased during his pastorate, and the salary continued as stated above, £130, Pennsylvania currency, or a little more than \$346, until 1798, when it was increased to £170, or \$453. This was not a very munificent stipend for a man who had spent several years in study to qualify himself for his labors. However, money had much more purchasing power in those days than it has at present.

After having been some years at Neshaminy he bought a farm of over 200 acres, lying on both sides of the turnpike leading to Philadelphia, four miles south of Doylestown, on which he resided till the close of his life. In 1810 he built, on the west side of the road, a short distance from the original dwelling, a house of dressed stone, which was more tasteful and costly than most residences of that period. It has been somewhat enlarged within fifteen or twenty years, but its appearance is now much as it was nearly 75 years ago, and its handsome walls and stately air testify that its projector was guided by sound judgment and enlarged views, and built not for the present only but for the future.

The next year after his ordination, 1775, the church edifice was enlarged and rebuilt. The structure first reared in 1743, had stood over 30 years. It was now too small to accommodate an increasing congregation. People at that time came distances of six or seven miles to worship at Neshaminy. There was no sanctuary at Doylestown, and none of the Presbyterian faith nearer than Addisville or Abington. Carriages with springs were scarcely known or very little in use. Those who had horses rode on horseback; husband and wife, or mother and a

child or two on the same animal, and there were till within a few years large stone horseblocks with steps in the yard for mounting and dismounting. Many, not only men, but women and girls walked to church, four or five miles, often barefoot, carrying their slippers and stockings in their hands. There was a spring of clear water not far from the meeting-house at which some would stop and wash their feet, and put on their shoes before entering, unlike the Mohammedans, who take off their sandals, as they go within a consecrated place. The change in the church building at that time was so extensive that it amounted almost to rearing a new one, and it was frequently spoken of as the "new church," the whole expense amounting to about \$2,000. It was not entirely finished for several years. In 1784 John Kerr was directed by the trustees to "paint the pillars of the gallery that have not been painted, and bring in his bill." Some difficulties arose between William Kerr and John Crawford, the superintending mechanics, in regard to the settlement of their accounts and the proper proportion which each should receive of the money paid to them by the corporation. These were adjusted after the lapse of ten years, by referring them to arbitrators (a good example), for which office Daniel Longstreth, Robert Loller and William Hart were chosen, all citizens of eminence in the region. When the matter was brought before them Daniel Longstreth was absent, but the others united in an opinion which happily reconciled the differences of the contending parties.

Mr. Irwin had a correct taste, and liked to see things ornamental and beautiful about the house of God, and no doubt at his suggestion, the trustees, in 1792, appointed a committee, consisting of himself, John Horner and Samuel Polk, to procure at least twenty-five trees and plant them on the meeting-house lot. He was attentive to the wants of his ministerial brethren, when they came into the neighborhood, and delighted in the exercise of the ancient, and we may say to-day, the modern virtue of hospitality. In the records of the corporation, of which he was a member a long time, we find a resolution adopted in 1793 that

"John Grier and John Carr to be a committee to provide for the accommodation of ye Presbytery of Philadelphia, which is to meet here ye

19th of November next; that Mr. Grier provide a cold collation and some cyder, and Mr. Carr make provision for ye horses of the members during the day-time, while Presbytery do sit."

Mr. Irwin was interested in the welfare of his people, both in respect to this world and another. As well-educated physicians were much less numerous than at the present day, he often prescribed for the sick who sought his advice, and in an old manuscript book which contains some of his own individual accounts and those of the corporation of the church, we find that he has charged several persons at different times with "medicine," "a vomit," "a purge," "a blister plaster," "dose salts," &c., which he had furnished them. For "a vomit," whatever that may mean, he charged Samuel Polk 9 pence, about 10 cents; to one for "Sally," the same; "Sally" may have been the daughter of Francis Jodan, in whose account the item appears. For a "purge" and "blister plaster" he set down against William Brady, 1s. 6d., about 20 cents each. Medicine and other remedies were not dear in those days. No doubt they were quite as effectual as if they had cost ten times as much. Some regular practitioners at that period had a low opinion of the medical skill of ministers. Esquire William H. Long, an octogenarian, formerly of Warrington, recently told me that Rev. William M. Tennent, D.D., pastor about a hundred years ago at Abington, occasionally prescribed for the sick. Dr. McLean, a physician of Montgomery county, was summoned to the bedside of a patient for whom Mr. Tennent had recommended some remedy, and when he knew what it was he exclaimed with some warmth, "I wish Mr. Tennent would let the body alone and attend to the soul."

Having a large farm Mr. Irwin sold some of his produce. As an illustration of prices at that time we may mention that he charged a customer for one and a half bushels of potatoes 3s. 9d., about 50 cents, and for "two days cradling," 15 shillings, or \$2. He employed different persons to assist him in the labors of the farm. The following is a sample of the written agreements into which he entered with them:

"Memorandum of a bargain made this 14th day of April, 1789, by and between the subscribers Nathaniel Irwin and William Dougherty. Said Irwin hath hired said Dougherty to labour for one year, engages to fur-

nish him with good and sufficient meat, drink, washing and lodging during said term, and to pay him at the end thereof sixty Spanish milled dollars. Said Dougherty engages to serve said Irwin diligently and faithfully at all such labour as he may employ him in during said term, to commence from this date; not to absent himself from his business, unless by consent of said Irwin. Should either party *chuse* to be free from the above bargain at or after the determination of six months, it shall be in his power so to be by giving one month's notice to the other, and said Irwin in that event to pay what arbitrators indifferently chosen shall award."

(Signed) NATHANIEL IRWIN,
WILLIAM DOUGHERTY.

Testis: Priscilla McKinstry.

He wrote for his neighbors and parishioners bonds, wills, deeds, contracts and other documents, settled estates, and went through with many items of public business which do not fall usually to the lot of clergymen at the present day. For writing "two arbitration bonds" he charged 5 shillings, about 66 cents; for writing a deed and four bonds, 18s. 4d., about \$2.42. Persons who had received a liberal education, and who were familiar with forms of law, were comparatively few in the community. The county-seat was then at Newtown, 12 miles distant. He possessed sound judgment and an acute intellect, and had the welfare of his people at heart, and was much resorted to by them for counsel in arranging disputes in regard to real estate. The widow and orphan found in him a friend and protector, in whom they could place implicit reliance. He exercised a powerful influence in the affairs of the county. When a movement was inaugurated to transfer the courts and public offices to Doylestown he advocated the change, and did much to turn the tide of public sentiment in its favor. The inhabitants of Newtown and vicinity were naturally opposed to it, and it is said that some one there published a large caricature of the old gentleman, in which he was depicted as without his hat and in his shirt sleeves, tugging away at ropes, which were thrown around the court-house, and pulling with all his might to draw it to its present location. He did much likewise to secure the selection of the tract of land of more than 300 hundred acres, which now constitutes the property of the almshouse. He was an earnest patriot, and previous to the Revolution sympathized with the sentiments and measures

that culminated in the separation from Great Britain. The synod of New York and Philadelphia in 1775 adopted a pastoral letter to all the churches under their care, in regard to the war, then commencing, which Mr. Irwin favored, and which breathed a devout spirit of patriotism, sorrow over the hostilities inaugurated, and dependence upon God to deliver the country from its calamities. During the progress of the struggle he often spoke to his people about the oppressions of the King and his counsellors, encouraging them to resistance, and prayed for the united colonies, that they might be rescued from tyranny and be free and independent. It is narrated that he was in church one Sunday morning, when the report came that the British were near on the march thither, and that he had only time to urge his hearers to be true to their country and trust in the God of battles and to commend them to him before mounting his horse to escape for his life. Gen. Washington in 1777 crossed the Delaware at Coryell's ferry, as it was then called, now New Hope, with his army, and went down the road past this meeting-house in which we now are (Buckingham meeting-house). Uncertain in regard to the destination of the British fleet, which had left New York harbor, he halted on Kerr's hill, near Neshaminy creek, about two weeks, and had his headquarters in the house now owned by Mrs. M. Bothwell, a few rods from the bridge above Hartsville. As soon as he learned that the enemy were in Chesapeake Bay he divined their purpose to attack Philadelphia in the rear, and set out with his troops at once with all his speed to meet them and prevent them from accomplishing their object. The battle of the Brandywine followed in a few days, which resulted unfavorably for our forces on account of their inferior number. While he was in the neighborhood of Neshaminy it is altogether likely that Mr. Irwin saw and conversed with the father-of-his-country, and with the Marquis de Lafayette, who joined the army there for the first time as an officer. Whether the General went to the church to hear the pastor preach we are not informed, but it is altogether probable he did, as we know he was in the habit of going to the meeting on Sunday, when the necessities of his responsible position permitted. Perhaps some of that congregation may

have been sitting for years in the very pew Washington sat in without knowing it! What a loss of gratification ignorance sometimes occasions us.

Mr. Irwin was interested in mathematics and natural philosophy. When the idea of using steam as a power to propel boats occurred to John Fitch, and he had constructed a model of an engine, he brought it to the pastor at Neshaminy, whose religious services he often attended, and whom he regarded with the highest respect as a man of profound intellect. He counselled and encouraged the young inventor, and we may therefore say without violence, that Mr. Irwin had a share in the work of introducing that mighty force in its application to navigation.

Mr. Irwin was regarded in ecclesiastical bodies in Presbytery, synod, and general assembly, as a keen, shrewd debater, and as well versed in the forms, usages and laws, by which their proceedings were governed. He filled the office of stated clerk of the general assembly one year, was its permanent clerk five years, and was elected moderator in 1801. He was also clerk of the old synod of New York and Philadelphia from 1781 to 1785. Rev. Dr. James P. Wilson once remarked to me, that synod and general assembly "depended much upon Mr. Irwin, and scarcely thought they could go on with their annual business until he arrived." He was methodical and exact in recording minute transactions, which needed to be transmitted to posterity, and had a clear, retentive memory. Dr. Alexander said of him, "Nathaniel Irwin, of Neshaminy, was an influential member of the assembly of 1781. It was easy to discern, that as his head was literally long, so it was intellectually." He possessed the gift of easy, fluent speech, and did not usually write his discourses, but delivered them in a language that came to him at the moment. He possessed the power of touching the feelings and hearts of his audience. At funerals he gave counsel and consolation to mourners and friends highly adapted to the occasion. Rev. Azariah Prior, an Episcopal clergyman, now deceased, said to me that in his youth he was present in Neshaminy church, when Mr. Irwin preached the sermon over the remains of a young lady, who had been killed by a sudden and unexpected

accident. A large number of her youthful acquaintances were there, and the venerable pastor chose as his text the passage. "Rise up, ye women that are at ease; hear my voice, ye careless daughters; give ear unto my speech." All were much affected, and before he closed, large numbers were in tears. Yet he found delight in social intercourse with his friends, and was cheerful and frequently gay and merry. He liked a joke, was quick in repartee, and could give and "take a jest with the best." Fond of music and the society of young people, they sometimes gathered at his house, when he would unbend from the labors of the day by playing for their entertainment upon the violin, in the use of which instrument he was skillful and found much enjoyment. He wished to have his clothes and shoes fit him loosely, so that he would feel in them no constraint, and told Israel Mullen, an uncle to Mrs. Wm. Rubinkam, the shoemaker, who in those days was a "peripatetic philosopher," and went from house to house to do his work, that he "wanted him to make his shoes so that he could put his fingers inside and fix his toes."

In 1811 the Presbyterian General Assembly determined to found a theological seminary, and Mr. Irwin, with some others, advocated the plan of adopting as a proper site the very spot near Hartsville, on which the "Log College" had stood an institution to which the Presbyterian church was greatly indebted. To show the strength of his interest in the matter he left in his will a bequest of \$1,000 to the seminary, on condition that it should be located there. Princeton, however, was ultimately chosen as its location. He also left a legacy of \$500, one share in the Pennsylvania Bank, to Princeton College, the interest of which should be paid yearly to the member of the American Whig Society, who should prove upon trial to be the most eloquent orator. In the financial reverses of 1837 this sum diminished in value one-half, and in 1857 it disappeared entirely. He also left \$2,000, four shares of the Pennsylvania Bank, to the use of his sister, Mrs. McEachran, of Spencertown, N. Y., during her life, and at her death to Neshaminy church. When the church divided, in 1838, this was separated into two parts, one of which went to Neshaminy church in Warwick, and the other

to Neshaminy church in Hartsville. The latter was put into the construction of the new church in Hartsville, and the former sunk out of sight in the crisis of 1857.

Mr. Irwin was twice married, first to Miss Martha Jamison, daughter of Henry Jamison, of Centreville, Bucks county, about the year 1777, by whom he had two children, a son and a daughter. The son, Henry, grew up to man's estate, was of a social disposition, and the life of every company into which he was thrown, but was led away by evil companions, and became addicted to the intoxicating cup. He married Miss Walker, of Warrington; and several children were born to them, who after their father's death removed with their mother to Ohio. Henry died at the early age of 32 years, February 7, 1812, only a few weeks before the decease of his venerable parent. His sister was the object of the most intense affection on the part of her father; she was amiable and lovely in mind, character and person, and he was scarcely willing that she should be out of his sight longer than the briefest period. She became the wife of Dr. William Hart, of Newtown, but died young in 1802, and her husband survived her only eight years, departing this life in 1810. The Governor of this State appointed Mr. Irwin recorder and register of Bucks county, while the offices were in Newtown, and as this place was at a distance from his home, his son-in-law discharged most of the duties of the appointment. The old gentleman was greatly disturbed by the frivolity and dissipation of his son Henry, and it probably impaired his health and his desire to live. The father soon followed the young man to the grave.

After the death of his first wife, which occurred in Chester county, about the year 1806, he married Priscilla McKinstry, who during the last years of his life deserved and received his warm appreciation and confidence as a companion, in whom he need not be ashamed. His last illness was not of long continuance. Only one Sabbath intervened between the day when he stood in the sacred desk and that in which his spirit took its flight to the rewards of the just. A large concourse of people, his own congregation and very many from the surrounding region, attended the remains as they were borne from his resi-

dence to the church, and it is said that the procession of carriages and people on horseback was a mile and a half long. Rev. Dr. J. P. Wilson, Sr., of the 1st church in Philadelphia, delivered the memorial discourse, and then all that was mortal of the beloved pastor was committed to the dust. He had expressed a desire that he might be buried in the spot over which the pulpit had stood in the first meeting-house, where William Tennent had preached. This wish was sacredly respected, and there he now reposes, awaiting the morning of the resurrection. On a horizontal marble tablet over his grave is the following inscription:

REV. NATHANIEL IRWIN

DIED MARCH 30, 1812

Aged 65 years, 4 mos. and 15 days.

To this sad tomb, whoe'er thou art, draw near;
Here lies a friend to truth; of soul sincere,
Of manners unaffected, and of mind
Enlarged; he wished the good of all mankind;
Calmly he looked on either life, for here
His peace was made, and nothing left to fear."

Admiral John A. Dahlgren, U. S. N.

BY REV. D. K. TURNER, HARTSVILLE, PA.

(New Britain Meeting, October 27, 1885.)

Our county has been the birthplace of many eminent men, and the residence for longer or shorter periods of many others, who have been distinguished in the learned professions, in the political arena and in the history of the national army and navy. Of the latter class was the subject of this sketch, Admiral John A. Dahlgren, who owned a farm, on which he resided three and a half years, in Warwick township, near Hartsville. It is not inappropriate, therefore, to review the incidents in his career and the important services he was able to render to his country both previous to the late Civil War and during that great struggle.

He sprang from a family in Sweden, whose founder's name was Borje Ericsson, but by royal license his ancestor was permitted in 1615 to take the name of *Dahl-gren*, meaning a *bough*