

A

HISTORY

OF THE

Presbyterian Church in America,

FROM ITS ORIGIN UNTIL THE YEAR 1760.

WITH

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCHES OF ITS EARLY MINISTERS.

BY THE

REV. RICHARD WEBSTER,

LATE PASTOR OF THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, MAUCH CHUNK, PA.

WITH

A Memoir of the Author,

BY THE REV. C. VAN RENSSELAER, D.D.

AND

An Historical Introduction,

BY THE REV. WILLIAM BLACKWOOD, D.D.

PUBLISHED BY AUTHORITY OF THE PRESBYTERIAN HISTORICAL SOCIETY.

PHILADELPHIA:

JOSEPH M. WILSON,

No. 27 SOUTH TENTH STREET, BELOW CHESTNUT ST.

1857.

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on the strict plan, requiring a full profession of godliness in all who presented children for baptism. The presbytery judged that he was not blameworthy, as was alleged, and gave him some cautions with respect to his natural turn and the formula suitable for baptism. Thus, for a time, were allayed "the jars and matters of uneasiness."

He was joined by the synod, in 1763, to the newly-formed Presbytery of Dutchess county. He had, for several years, no small difficulty with his session: two elders were dismissed from their office by him and the other elders; and the presbytery admitted their right, in common with every other body in church or state, to purge itself. Mr. John Lawrence appealed to the synod from some other decision of presbytery; and, having declared all the grievances he had to allege against his pastor, it was decided that they were too trivial, even if true, to warrant any judicial censure, and could in no way justify any in forsaking Ball's public ministrations. He was dismissed, December 21, 1768, and when his successor resigned, in 1772, he resumed the charge, and remained till 1784. Having spent four years at Amity, in Woodbridge, Connecticut, he removed, with a part of the Bedford congregation, in 1788, to Saratoga county. The settlement was named Ball Town, but has long since become widely known as Ballston. He died in 1797.

HUGH KNOX

CAME from Ireland in 1751, and the Synod of Philadelphia, hearing that he and Mr. John Alison were desirous of being taken on trials, directed them to meet Newcastle Presbytery at Elk River. Probably they did so; for Alison was soon licensed, and was extensively employed as a missionary in the Southern provinces.

Knox gave up all thought of the ministry, and led a life of worldly gayety, teaching for a support. He was recommended, by Dr. Francis Alison, to Rodgers, of St. George's, and was employed as a teacher near Middletown, Delaware. He attended the Forest Church on Sabbath mornings, and kept his tavern-companions in a roar, of an evening, by imitations of Rodgers,—imitations so complete that Mr. David Witherspoon, the keeper of the house, and an elder in the Old-Side Church of Drawyers, imagined that it must be Mr. Rodgers himself, until he entered the room. Soon after, he shook off these follies, and entered Nassau Hall: at the commencement he requested Mr. Rodgers, who with great surprise

saw him there, to forgive him, and not publish his delinquencies, for his mimicry had been the means of his conversion.

He graduated in 1754, and probably studied divinity with Burr. The Reformed Dutch Church in the island of Saba requested New York Presbytery to send them a minister. They proceeded to ordain Knox, in 1755, and were so much pleased with his trial sermon, on the "Dignity and Importance of the Gospel Ministry," that they unanimously requested its publication.*

He had, on receiving from the Rev. Jacob Green, of Hanover, New Jersey, a copy of his sermon on the sinner's faultiness and inability, corresponded with him freely on his peculiar opinions on those points. In 1769, he published "A Letter to Mr. Green,"† expressing his high regard for him, and for the candour and charity he displayed towards him.

The Rev. Dr. Green, in an article on the New Haven speculations concerning God's inability to constitute a world of free agents, in which sin should not enter, states that a similar theory had been advanced by Mr. Knox, in this pamphlet. We are indebted to the zeal of Bishop Hobart for rescuing Knox's pamphlet from oblivion, by embalming it in the Churchman's Magazine for 1808 and '09. It serves to show the wretched sophistry of Hobart; for he has appended to it a note in which he praises the ninth article of "our church" for saying that "IT (original sin) deserveth God's wrath and damnation," and for implying that the persons in whom original sin is do not deserve it: a distinction not unlike that of the baron bishop, who fought as a baron only, and gave some anxiety thereby to his friends, who feared that the devil, in clutching the baron, might not be able to carry him off without bearing the bishop along.

Knox appears in this letter as a man of acute mind, clear and vigorous in thought and expression, candid, and open to conviction. Green had probably known the difficulties that he felt on some parts of the Hopkinsian scheme; and on the publication, in 1767, of his sermon from Romans ix. 19, on the sinner's faultiness and spiritual inability, he wrote to Knox, sending him a copy. This occasioned Knox's pamphlet. He thanks him for his sermon and his very kind letter, and then says, "I entirely approve of, and cordially adhere to, that scheme of religion which tends to exalt God and humble the creature. I think God can never be exalted high enough in the thoughts of the creature, nor the sinful creature sunk low enough in his own thoughts. Could I imagine that there was one article in my creed which favoured the opposite false abominable doctrine, I would tear it off with indignation, and tear

* Massachusetts Historical Society's Library.

† New York Society's Library.

away that part of my heart which had harboured it." He then adds, that "absolute, unconditional reprobation" seems abhorrent to every just view of God, and assumes that it was held by Green, whereas no man was further than he from supposing that reprobation follows any one, but as the just punishment of his sin, and is not always conditional on the blameworthiness of the sinner.

Knox was staggered, and very reasonably too, by such expressions as these:—"God has willed, ordered, and in his way caused, the quantum of sin in the world; and this, too, as a necessary and glorious display of his holiness." "If God had ordered less sin in the world, it would have proved him to be not a good and holy, but an envious, being." He supposed that, "of all possible plans of a world, God adopted the one which was best on the whole." He hesitated at supposing that God might have made a world of free agents without the possibility of their falling into sin. He conceived that God could not, in consistency with his perfections and the free agency of the creature, make a system of free accountable creatures without the possibility of sin's entering into the system. He made a distinction between Adam's liberty in a state of innocence, and that of sinners under a dispensation of preventing restraining grace.

His repugnance was strong to the Hopkinsian notion of benevolence, and of the necessity of sin to the highest display of God's glory, and to President Edwards's doctrine of the necessary connection between moral effects and their causes, or the motives which produce them. "Make it," says he, "appear clear on your principles [those of Edwards and Hopkins] that God is exculpated from the charge of having any causality in producing sin, and I am satisfied. Consider me in the humble capacity of a learner. I have such a firm persuasion of your piety, and such a respect for your judgment and candour, as will keep me from uncharitableness in thought or language towards you. There breathes such a spirit of kindness and goodness through all your letters as secures both my affection and my gratitude.

"The distinction between natural and moral inability, I have ever thought an important and useful one, when well stated and explained. My worthy and excellent friend, President Burr, was the first who ever gave me an idea of this distinction. He did it in three sermons, preached from Joshua xxiv. 19:—'Ye cannot serve the Lord, for he is an holy God.' He acknowledged they were the substance of Edwards's book relative to that subject, and expressed a pretty strong desire of having them printed, as some of the most useful and important he had ever preached. I would define *moral inability* thus:—A natural and contracted disinclination or aversion to the exercises of piety and moral virtue, which becomes faulty and criminal by our resisting the motives which

would have overcome it; and neglecting, by prayer and other duties, to apply to God, through the Redeemer, for those influences of the Holy Spirit, by which it would have been wholly subdued, and our volitions and actions engaged on the side of piety and moral rectitude.

“The system of the ancient Calvinists is well jointed, and hangs together; but Calvinism, as held by President Edwards’s admirers, seems to me as different from it as Arminianism,—a middle thing patched up out of both,—and ought to be called ‘Edwardism.’”

“I greatly question,” he says, “what you say on p. 19:—‘They have all the powers that can be conceived in the nature of things for a sinner to have; for they have light in the understanding; they see the reasonableness and fitness of things, and the obligations they are under.’ I always thought the understanding was sadly darkened and blinded by the fall; that the natural man could not know nor discern the things of God, and that it required the power of renewing grace to cure this faculty of its blindness; but I find that Mr. Hopkins and you make out this faculty pretty sound and vigorous, as though it had suffered little, if any thing, by the original apostasy.”

These extracts speak favourably of the spirit of the man, and show that he was a strenuous opponent of Hopkinsianism. Unfortunately, he resorted to a bad hypothesis in order to get rid of one not so bad, anticipating therein the New Haven divinity, and following, if we may believe the Edinburgh Review, in the steps of Bishop Butler, Dr. Balguy, and Archdeacon Paley.

What effect the pamphlet produced, who answered it, and whether the New York Presbytery took notice of it, are among the things unknown.

Yale College gave him the degree of A.M. in 1768, and the University of Glasgow made him a Doctor in Divinity.

In 1772, his church was destroyed by a hurricane; and, at the request of New York Presbytery, the synod, in 1773, appropriated fifty pounds out of the collections for pious uses, to aid him in rebuilding. The presbytery corresponded with him yearly, through Dr. Rodgers, and expressed their regret on hearing, after the Revolution, of the declining condition of his flock. They asked him if there was not some way in which they could aid him.

In the records of Norwalk, Connecticut, is entered the baptism of his son Hugh, in 1781, who graduated at Yale in 1800.

He spent the closing years of his life in St. Croix, and died there in October, 1790.

The celebrated Alexander Hamilton,* in early boyhood, was placed under the instruction of Dr. Knox, who, delighted with the

* Life of Hamilton.

unfolding of his mind, took a deep interest in his welfare; and Knox's fervent piety gave a strong religious bias to Hamilton's feelings. Knox espoused the American cause warmly, and maintained a pleasant and familiar correspondence with his pupil.

He published two volumes of sermons on interesting subjects at Glasgow, in 1772. A copy is in the library of Nassau Hall.

HENRY MARTIN

GRADUATED at Nassau Hall in 1751, and was licensed by New York Presbytery. Hopewell and Maidenhead asked for him, in May, 1752. He was accused of having behaved ill, in preaching as a candidate at Tchicken, and refusing to settle, as they thought he had encouraged them to expect; but New Brunswick Presbytery examined the matter and justified him. He was called to Newtown and Salisbury, in Bucks county, in May, 1753, and was ordained and installed by Abingdon Presbytery, April 9, 1754. He died before May, 1764.

JOHN HOGE,

A SON of William Hoge*, "an exile, for Christ's sake," from Scotland, in the days of the persecution. After some time spent in Amboy, he removed to Delaware, and from thence to the Swatara, in Dauphin county, Pennsylvania. He was among the first settlers on Cedar Creek, in Opeckon, Virginia.

Samuel Gelston went there, as the first missionary of our church, in the fall of 1735. "O Pekin wrote for him" to Donegal Presbytery in the next May, and he was sent. Anderson visited the place in 1737. Craig and Thomson were there in 1739,— "both parts of Opeckon" having written for Thomson. In April, 1740, Cavin was at Bullskin and Opeckon: Lyon and Anderson went thither. Year after year came its supplications. It also asked for Lyon in 1740, and for Hyndman in 1742. With the

* MS. Life of Dr. Moses Hoge: by Rev. J. B. Hoge.