

A
HISTORY
OF THE
Presbyterian Church in America,

FROM ITS ORIGIN UNTIL THE YEAR 1760.

WITH
BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCHES OF ITS EARLY MINISTERS.

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WITH
A Memoir of the Author,
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AND
An Historical Introduction,
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JOHN TENNENT,

THE third son of Tennent, of Neshaminy, was born in county Armagh, (Ireland,) November 12, 1707.* His anguish when awakened was violent in degree. He had been subject to rash anger, and was for four days "a rack of acute and continued anguish under dismal apprehensions of impending ruin and endless misery from vengeance of a just and holy God." His consolations were eminent and conspicuous.

He was educated by his father, and was taken on trial by Newcastle Presbytery, November 21, 1728, when he delivered "a homily to universal satisfaction." He was licensed September 18, 1729, and went as supply to Brandywine, Middletown, Newcastle, and Middle and Lower Octorara. Reports being raised of his having spoken unwisely, Creaghead, Thomson, and Hutcheson conferred with him, and were satisfied that the rumour was unfounded.

About this time Freehold became vacant, and the people were so grievously divided, that there seemed no hope of their ever settling a minister. Walter Kerr left his harvest-field† and went to Neshaminy to persuade Tennent to go home with him. He totally refused; but Kerr told him, on leaving him, that he knew he would soon decide differently. He sent after Kerr to say he would come; but, on coming, he expressed his regret in having consented to visit a people who seemed given up by God for their abuse of the gospel.

There was a German sect that styled themselves "The New Born," and were widely spoken of for their follies and their sins. In Monmouth, this name was applied in derision to those who professed to experience religion under the faithful labours of Frelinghuysen and the English ministers.

Tennent stayed only four or five Sabbaths; but the Lord so blessed his labours‡ that he was thoroughly persuaded Christ had a full harvest to bring home there. He said that, should they call him, he would settle with them, poor and broken though they were, and though, by so doing, he should be put to beg his bread. He had a unanimous call, April 15, 1730, and was ordained by Philadelphia Presbytery, November 19. Rightly dividing the word of

* Quoted by Dr. Alexander, from his life by Gilbert Tennent.

† On his return, he found that his neighbours had cut his grain and stacked it. A very general loss of the crop followed through some accident after housing it. Kerr's escaped, and furnished seed to those who had so kindly reaped his field. This tradition was mentioned to me by the Rev. Job F. Halsey.

‡ William Tennent, of Freehold, in the Christian History.

truth, he avoided the "bane of preaching,"* setting a common mess before his hearers and leaving to them to divide it among themselves as fancy and humour directed." Wonderful success attended him; the place of worship was usually crowded with persons of all classes and persuasions, listening as for their lives. Sometimes the body of the congregation was moved, minister and people being wet with tears, many sobbing, and some carried out as if they were dead. There was "no public outcry." A great reformation followed; "all talked of religion, though all did not approve of the power of it."

He died April 23, 1732, aged twenty-five; for six months before he was unable to preach, his pulpit being supplied by his brother William. During his sickness, many came, inquiring what they must do to be saved; but the blessing on his labours to the conviction and conversion of souls, was more discernible after his death. Almost in every neighbourhood were sin-sick souls, longing for Christ, the dear physician.

His brother Gilbert appended to his "Presumptuous Sinner Detected," a life of his brother, with his two sermons on the "Nature of Regeneration, and its absolute necessity in order to Salvation demonstrated." Whitefield, on reading it, exclaimed, "Let me die the death of that righteous man!" Dickinson prepared an epitaph for his tomb. Dr. Alexander speaks of his sermons as in no way remarkable, but sensible, solemn, and earnest.

WILLIAM TENNENT,

THE second son of the minister of Neshaminy, was born in county Antrim, June 3, 1705.

He was early led to the Saviour, and, upon finishing his classical course with his father, he began† the study of divinity with his brother Gilbert. While preparing for examination before the presbytery, he fell ill with a pain in his breast and a slight hectic fever. His flesh dropped away till little hope of life remained; his spirits sunk, and his hope of salvation was wellnigh gone. While conversing with Gilbert in Latin on his fears for his soul, he fainted, and every sign of life departed except a scarcely-perceptible tremour under the left arm. He was laid on a cooling-board;

* Gilbert Tennent.

† Memoir of Tennent, of Freehold, by Dr. Henderson, and commonly ascribed to Elias Boudinot.