

A

HISTORY

OF THE

Presbyterian Church in America,

FROM ITS ORIGIN UNTIL THE YEAR 1760.

WITH

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCHES OF ITS EARLY MINISTERS.

BY THE

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WITH

A Memoir of the Author,

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AND

An Historical Introduction,

BY THE REV. WILLIAM BLACKWOOD, D.D.

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JOSEPH M. WILSON,

No. 27 SOUTH TENTH STREET, BELOW CHESTNUT ST.

1857.

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Davies said of him, in his elegy on Samuel Blair:—

“When, all-attentive, eager to admit
The flowing knowledge, at his reverend feet
Raptured we sat, O thou above the rest,
Brother and image of the dear deceased,
Surviving Blair! oh, let spontaneous flow
The floods of tributary grief you owe.”

SAMUEL FINLEY

Was born in the county Armagh, Ireland, in 1715. His parents early sought the Lord's blessing on each of their children, and he was seriously impressed by divine truth in his sixth year. The family arrived at Philadelphia, September 28, 1734, and made their home in West Jersey. He was in his eighteenth year, and had already made some progress in preparing for the ministry: he completed his studies at the Log College. New Brunswick Presbytery took him on trials, August 4, 1740, and licensed him the next day. He went into the bounds of Donegal Presbytery, and was present at the trial of Craighead, in December, and abetted him in his contumelious treatment of that judicatory. He preached, January 20, 1741, at Nottingham, from Matthew xii. 27, 28:—“If I by Beelzebub cast out devils, by whom then do your sons cast them out?” This sermon was published with the title, “Christ victorious, and Satan raging,” and was soon reprinted at Boston and London. Soon after appeared in print his letter in commendation of Whitefield.

The conjunct presbyteries, in August, 1741, sent him to Dover and Baltimore, and directed him to supply the new erection at Nottingham. He then went into West Jersey, and his labours were remarkably blessed at Greenwich, in Cohanzy, and Deerfield, in Gloucester county. Whitefield had passed through the region, and Gilbert Tennent had laboured there. “There was a remarkable stir of a religious kind in Cape May.” In the spring of 1740, Abel Morgan, the Baptist minister in Middletown, New Jersey, “was so affected by Whitefield's spirit that he went forth preaching the gospel on the sea-coast” and other places in that province. He came to Cohanzy, and Finley soon appeared: on Tuesday he went to Cape May, and on Thursday Finley came. The mode and the subjects of baptism became the topic of general discourse; “many of the disciples went among the Baptists, which caused

great wrath."* Finley and Morgan had a debate which lasted two days, with the usual result of greater estrangement of the parties. Two elders and six members left the Presbyterian for the Baptist church. Finley published "A Charitable Plea for the Speechless;" Morgan replied. Finley vindicated the claim of infants to the promise and the seal of the promise; Morgan put forth a rejoinder. Morgan Edwards says that Morgan's book shows him to have been a man of wit, of very genteel irony, and master of the Greek.

Morgan alludes to Finley's fondness for controversy. He printed, in January, 1743, a sermon, on 2 Thessalonians ii. 11, 12, against the Moravians, entitled "The Strength, Nature, and Symptoms of Delusion," and, in the same year, replied to Thomson's sermon on convictions, in a discourse headed, "Clear Light shining out in Obscure Darkness." In all of these early productions is much that is uncalled for, and much more that cannot be approved.

Cohanzy and Gloster supplicated for him in May, 1742. The presbytery granted the request, and ordained him an evangelist, October 13: Robinson preached from Ezekiel iii. 17. He went to preach for the Presbyterians in Milford, Connecticut; but Lieutenant-Governor Law put an odious statute, lately enacted, in force, and he was carried from one constable to another and transported as a vagrant out of the colony. In August, 1743, calls were presented to him from Cohanzy, Nottingham, and Milford, and the presbytery sent him to Milford "with allowance that he also preach for other places thereabouts where Providence may open a door for him." Having preached at Milford, he went, on the 1st of September, to preach for the Second Society of New Haven, at the request of Mr. James Pierpont, the son of the former pastor of the First Church, and the brother-in-law of the present pastor. The Second Church, though regularly organized, was not recognised by the civil authority or the New Haven Association; it was an indictable offence to preach for them. Yet Finley went; and, on September 5, as he was going to meeting, he was seized by the constable and confined. The grand jury presented him on the 11th, and judgment was given that he should be carried out of the colony as a vagrant. The sentence was executed. Finley petitioned in October that the Assembly would review the case; pleas were heard in abatement, and his prayer was denied. During these visits he made many friends, and maintained a most affectionate correspondence with Bellamy till his death. He spent six months in Philadelphia, preaching to the new congregation. He

* Morgan Edwards's History of New Jersey Baptists.

was called, in June, 1744, to Nottingham, and was the pastor there seventeen years.

In the summer of 1745, by appointment of the conjunct presbyteries, Gilbert Tennent and Finley waited on Governor Gooch to repel the insinuations made against Roan, and the New Side in general, as schismatics, defamers, and fanatics. The governor received them kindly, gave them permission to preach, and opened the door for the preaching of New-Light ministers without molestation. They continued at Hanover about a week, and did much good. The people of God were refreshed, and some careless sinners awakened from their foolish trust in their moral conduct and religious duties. Thus the dreadful cloud which overshadowed them on Roan's persecution was scattered for a while: they continued vacant for a considerable time, but the Lord favoured their reading-meetings with his presence.

Finley's school soon became celebrated. Among his pupils were Governor Martin, of North Carolina, Ebenezer Hazard, of Philadelphia, Benjamin Rush, M.D., and Judge Jacob Rush, (sons of Mrs. Finley's sister,) Dr. McWhorter, of Newark, Dr. Tennent, of Abingdon, and, most celebrated of all, James Waddel, of Virginia.

In 1754, it was proposed to call him to New-York: he was liked as a preacher, "but, his voice being uncommon low, it was thought he would not suit" that congregation.

When Davies was urged, after having declined the presidency, to act as vice-president of the college for six months, he would not consent, on hearing from the messenger, Mr. Halsey, afterwards minister at Lamington, that some of the trustees preferred Finley. He wrote at once to Cowell, of Trenton, "I recommend Mr. Finley, from long and intimate acquaintance with him, as the best-qualified person, in the compass of my knowledge, in America,—incomparably better qualified than myself. Though the want of some superficial accomplishments for empty popularity may keep him in obscurity for some little time, his hidden worth, in a few months or years at most, will blaze out to the satisfaction and even astonishment of all candid men. A disappointment of this kind will certainly be of service to the college."

In a note to a sermon in May, 1758, he styles him "the best of men, and my favourite friend."

He was elected, on the death of Davies, to be his successor; and, soon after entering on the office, there was an extensive revival in the college: about half the students experienced religion.

He died, July 17, 1766, while in Philadelphia, whither he had gone for medical advice. His state of mind was peculiarly happy and redolent of divine influence. Dr. Mason has placed, in striking contrast, his end with the closing scene of David Hume's life. Treat, of Abingdon—the last survivor, except Tennent, of Free-

hold, of the brethren cast out in 1741—preached at the funeral of his good fellow-labourer in that day of abundant harvest.

Small in figure, with a round, ruddy face, he was remarkable for great knowledge of the human heart, for uncommon sweetness of temper, and polite behaviour. Many were his long and fatiguing journeys to carry the gospel to vacant and destitute congregations. Abundant in labours, fervent in spirit, He that sent him was with him, giving him, in the establishing of many hearts with grace through his preaching, testimony that his work pleased God.

His first wife, Sarah Hall, died, at the age of forty-two, July 30, 1761,—her mother being the second wife of Gilbert Tennent,—and lies buried at the “Rising Sun.” His second wife was Ann Clarkson, daughter of Matthew Clarkson, Esq., of Philadelphia. His son Ebenezer was a physician in Charleston; and his son William Perroneau Finley is the President of Charleston College. Dr. Finley’s daughter married Samuel Breeze, of Amboy, and among her descendants is the inventor of the electric telegraph.

He published, in 1749, his sermon at the ordination of Rodgers; in 1751, on the death of Samuel Blair; in 1754, at the opening of the Synod of New York, from 2 Cor. x. 14; in 1762, on the death of Davies; and in 1764, at the funeral of Gilbert Tennent.

He was the second minister of our church who received the degree of Doctor of Divinity. The University of Glasgow, having conferred it before on Alison, “adorned” Finley with it in 1763.

At Nottingham, he had for his near neighbour Samuel Blair; and Davies says of their intimacy,—

“Finley, who full enjoy’d the unbosom’d friend.”

After his death, Mr. Ebenezer Hazard made persevering attempts to publish a collection of his works; but a sufficient number of subscribers was not obtained.

ELIAB BYRAM

WAS born at Bridgewater, Massachusetts, and graduated at Harvard University in 1740. His ancestor, Nicholas Byram, settled at Bridgewater in 1660.

He became the minister of Rocsiticus, now Mendham, New Jersey, in October, 1743. Before 1740, there had been a meeting-house about a mile and a half from the village; in 1745, a new one was built in town, and continued in use till 1816. Rocsiticus was placed under the care of New Brunswick Presbytery in 1738, but, at its request, was restored to New York Presbytery the next year.

Brainerd had him for his companion in his first journey to the Susquehanna, and speaks of him with much affection. He spent