

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
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WILLIAM ROBINSON

WAS the son of a wealthy Quaker physician, near Carlisle, in England. Having gone up in early life to London, he was ensnared into foolish courses, which made him ashamed to return to his father's house. He came to America, and taught school in Hope-well, N.J., from 1729 until 1739.

At the commencement of the Revival, and probably under the influence of Rowland, his mind was filled with amazement, in contemplating the starry heavens, at the thought of his having lived so regardless of their Maker. "While meditating* on the beauty and grandeur of the firmament, and saying to himself, 'How transcendently glorious must the Author of all this beauty and grandeur be!' the thought struck him with the suddenness and the force of lightning, 'But what do I know of this God? Have I ever sought his favour, or made him my friend?' This impression never left him till he took refuge in Christ as the hope and life of his soul."

He studied at the Log College while he went on with his school, and was taken on trials by New Brunswick Presbytery, April 1, 1740, and was licensed on the 27th of the next month. In August he was sent to Craig's and Hunter's settlements in the Forks of Delaware, (Allen township and Mount Bethel,) to "Mr. Green's and Pequally (Panaquarry,) N.J. He was ordained an evangelist, Aug. 4, 1741, and was again sent to the 'Forks.'"

He declined the call to Neshaminy, which was presented to him Aug. 2, 1742, and was directed to supply there and at the "New Erection," in Nottingham.

"His dear memory† will mingle with my softest and most grateful recollections as long as I am capable of reflection. The necessitous circumstances of many vacancies, and the prospect of more extensive usefulness, engaged him to expose his shattered constitution to all the hardships and fatigues of almost uninterrupted itinerations. Tracing his travels in sundry parts of Pennsylvania, Maryland, and Virginia, I cannot recollect one place in which he officiated for any time where there were not some illustrious effects of his ministry. He had a noble, disinterested ambition to preach Christ where he was not named; and therefore he took a journey to the new settlements at the South, in which he continued two years, oppressed with the usual difficulties a weakly constitution feels in travelling a wilderness, and animated only by his glorious successes."

* Miller's Life of Rodgers.

† Davies to Bellamy.

The smallpox is said to have left lasting debilitating effects on his frame, and to have disfigured his countenance and deprived him of an eye.

James River had applied to New Brunswick Presbytery in 1739, and again in 1741; but nothing seems to have been done in the way of granting supplies. In the winter of 1742, Robinson entered Virginia, and was seized near Winchester by the sheriff as an unlicensed preacher, but was soon released. He went up* the Valley, and spent the winter in North Carolina, where, by exposure, he contracted a disease which clung to him all his days. He had not much success in that province: he penetrated as far as the Pedee. In 1751, one hundred families on that river petitioned Hanover Presbytery for a minister. Returning, he preached with great success in Charlotte, Prince Edward, Campbell, and Albemarle counties, lately settled by great numbers of Irish Presbyterians from Pennsylvania. In Lunenburg, near the North Carolina line, there were a few Presbyterians settled among a number of loose Virginians. He was the happy instrument of reclaiming many thoughtless creatures, and of founding a flourishing congregation.

In Hanover and Louisa,† Mr. James Hunt, Mr. Samuel Morris, and two other gentlemen, were, by the reading of "Boston's Fourfold State," and "Luther on the Galatians," awakened to a sense of their perishing state: without being aware of any person's feeling as he did, each absented himself from the parish church and its lifeless ministrations. Being summoned to answer for this offence, each man found his case was not singular. They agreed to meet at each other's houses on the Sabbath and read the Scriptures and Luther's great work. For this they were frequently fined. A copy of the sermons which Whitefield had preached at Glasgow, and which were printed from notes taken by a hearer, fell into the hands of Morris in 1742: benefited by it himself, he invited his neighbours to come and hear it. "The plainness and fervency of these discourses being attended with the power of the Lord, many were awakened, and could not avoid crying out, weeping bitterly and even giving strange and ridiculous indications of their concern. The house became crowded; the Lord was speaking as on Mount Sinai, with a voice of thunder, and sinners, like that mountain, trembled to the centre. A goodly little number were healed by the word, that wondered and rejoiced understandingly in Christ. A reading-house was built: having not been used to social prayer, none of them durst attempt it. Other reading-houses were built, and the number of attendants and the force of divine influence much increased."

The leaders were summoned‡ to appear at Williamsburg, and on

* The river runs northerly, so that going *southward* is going *up* the valley.

† Davies to Bellamy.

‡ Mr. James Hunt: quoted by Dr. Foote.

their way, being overtaken by a storm, they stopped at a poor man's house, on whose shelf lay a ragged copy of the Westminster Confession. The whole summary pleased them; and, having received the book, they presented it to Governor Gooch as the expression of their views. The Governor was a Scotsman, and, recognising the book, at once said that they were Presbyterians according to the Kirk of Scotland, and could not be molested. During the deliberation of the Council, a thunder-storm shook the house and lightnings glared fearfully, and they were let go, with a caution not to disturb the peace. Being dismissed, they very naturally and joyfully regarded the storm as let loose to "still the enemy and the avenger."

A man going from Augusta* to Hanover for iron and salt, spoke of Robinson, and excited a desire to hear him. Some young people from Hanover, being at Cub Creek, heard him; and this led Morris, and his friends to send some of their number to hear him preach, and, if they approved of his doctrines, to invite him to visit Hanover. They found him at the Rockfish Gap, and prevailed on him to promise to come.

He travelled through most of the night to reach the place at the appointed day. Having seen his credentials, learned his doctrine and method of procedure, they were very eager to hear him. A large crowd assembled; a venerable spreading oak, with embowering shades, gave him and them shelter. It was the Sabbath, July 3, 1743; he preached from Luke xiii. 3. He preached four days: the concourse increased vastly. "'Tis hard† for the liveliest imagination to form an image of the condition of the audience in those glorious days of the Son of Man. Many came through curiosity, and were convinced of their entire ignorance of religion. There is reason to believe there was as much good done by those four sermons as by all preached in the next seven years."

In private he succeeded in removing some doctrinal errors, and in engaging them to use prayer and singing of psalms in their meetings. They offered to remunerate him: he said, "I have enough;" but, overcome by their urgency, he took the money and applied it to assist Davies in his studies.

When he came to Cub Creek,‡ the people were warned that he would preach at the stand. David Austin, a half-breed, but terrible as a full-blooded Indian, went to hear, and lay down at a distance, as if to sleep. He rose on hearing the text, "Awake, thou that sleepest," and pressed near to the stand, the people making way. He returned home in great distress: his convictions were agonizing, and his deliverance remarkable. He became an eminent

* Davidson's Kentucky.

† Mr. Samuel Morris: quoted by Davies.

‡ Related to me in May, 1843, by Dr. Alexander.

Christian; troubled souls far and wide sought his counsel. The excellent Mrs. Morton had heard Davies and his compeers, and the Smiths and their associates; but she believed that none equalled Davy Austin in skill to administer consolation to the disquieted and desponding believer.

On his way to Hanover, Robinson reproved a tavern-keeper for his profanity.

"Who are you?" was the rude demand.

"A minister of the gospel," was the reply. "Go with me, and you may hear me preach."

He promised to do so, if Robinson would preach from the words, "I am fearfully and wonderfully made," designing to jeer his visage, scarred and seamed. Robinson preached from the text: the wicked man heard, and became a very pious and useful member of the church. Davies was "the joyful witness of the happy effects of the four sermons on sundry thoughtless impenitents and sundry abandoned profligates. They have, ever since, given good evidence of a thorough conversion."

His next field of labour was in "the Government of New York," probably in the Highlands. Gilbert Tennent heard that many had been awakened by his labours.

In 1745, a most glorious display of grace began by his ministry in Wicomico, in Somerset county, Maryland. In Baltimore county, there was a considerable revival; in Kent county and Queen Anne's, a number of careless sinners were awakened and hopefully brought to Christ. "The work was begun and mostly carried on by that favoured man, Mr. Robinson, whose success, whenever I reflect on it, astonishes me."

The last six months of his life he spent at St. George's, Delaware, and took charge of the congregation. Of his labours there we have no record. There was a revival there under his occasional visits previously and those of Whitefield. It seems to have constituted a part of Bohemia congregation, and to have enjoyed the benefits of Whitefield's visit in November, 1740. It became a separate congregation; and Robinson, in March, 1746, took his dismission from New Brunswick Presbytery to Newcastle, with a view of becoming their pastor. But his end was at hand. He died, August 1, 1746.

Blair preached at George's Town, August 3, a sermon, in commemoration of him, from Zech. i. 7. He speaks of his abiding sense of the deplorable condition of the unregenerate, and of his liberality, often giving away, at a time, twenty and forty pounds.

The Synod of New York, at its first meeting in September, 1745, having considered the circumstances of Virginia, and the wide door that is opened for the preaching of the gospel there, are unanimously of the opinion, that Mr. Robinson is the most suit-

able person to be sent, and do earnestly recommend him to go down and help them, as soon as his circumstances will permit, and reside there for some months.

Robinson was present at that meeting, and probably intended to go. On his death-bed, he left it as his last request to Davies to go to Hanover. To him he bequeathed* most of his books, having previously aided him with money.

Davies had him in the highest estimation:—"Oh, he did much in a little time! Who would not choose such an expeditious pilgrimage through this world?"

The father of Dr. Moses Hoge had heard him preach near Opequhon, Virginia, and thought that his sermons lacked method. They possessed a living power. "Thanks be unto God, who always caused him to triumph in Christ, and made manifest the savour of his knowledge by him in every place."

CHARLES BEATTY

WAS born in county Antrim, Ireland, between 1712 and 1715. His father died while he was a child. His mother, Christiana, was of the Clinton family,† who removed from England to county Longford during the Great Rebellion, being attached to the Royalists. Her brother, Charles Clinton, with Alexander Deniston and others, took ship, in 1729, for Philadelphia. They sailed in May, and reached Cape Cod in October, and remained in New England till 1731, when they began a settlement in Ulster, now Orange county, New York.

Beatty had received a classical education in Ireland to some extent, and may have profited by the instructions of the pastors of Goshen, Wallkill, and Bethlehem. Reaching manhood, he engaged in trade; and, as was the manner of that day,—when, in the country, few out of the seaport-towns had the capital to lay in a supply of imported goods,—he travelled‡ on foot, or with his pack-horse, to display his "auld-worl'd gear" to the people in their own homes. Stopping at the Log College, he amused himself by surprising Tennent and his pupils with a proffer in Latin of his merchandise. Tennent, perceiving at once that this was "no pedlar's Greek," replied in Latin; and the conversation went

* Davenport to Edwards.

† Hosack's Life of De Witt Clinton.

‡ Dr. Miller: on the authority of Dr. Rodgers.