

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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God which are yea and amen in Christ Jesus, and endeavours to make them yea and amen in a natural man's good endeavours; and because he now and then turns off some of what he looks upon to be asperities and unrighteous severities in the holy law of God. He is evidently a very inaccurate writer, a man of little reading, and has no settled scheme that will, in any tolerable measure, hold together. I am afraid some will attempt to answer him who, though they may hold more truths, are as far from any well-digested scheme of religion as he. I should be extremely glad, if he lay in your way, you would drop some reflections which might have a tendency to make him know his standing."

John Blair published an answer to his "Appeal to the Christian World," entitled, "The Synod* of New York and Philadelphia Defended."

Harker† married Rachel Lovel, daughter of a French Protestant residing at Oyster Bay, Long Island, a most excellent woman. One of his daughters married Dr. Caldwell, of Lamington, who, dying early, left her with an infant,—the Rev. Dr. Joseph Caldwell, President of the University of North Carolina. Another married Judge Symmes, of Marietta, Ohio.

JOHN WRIGHT

WAS born in Scotland, and, while living in Virginia, enjoyed the friendship of Davies. He graduated at Nassau Hall in 1752, and was admitted to special intimacy by Mr. Burr,‡ being of a very good character for understanding, prudence, and piety. On leaving college, he travelled in New England, and visited Jonathan Edwards. Davenport wrote to Bellamy,§ May 29, 1753, "Mr. Wright, who was licensed last winter, (by Newcastle Presbytery,) is to be ordained in about a fortnight, to go to Virginia and Carolina." He was the principal supply of Hanover while Davies was in England; and, on his return, he found that he had conducted judiciously and to admiration.

In 1761, he wrote|| to Mr. Peter Munford, (Montford,) of the Fishkills, a friend and benefactor of his; and, "after an agreeable recollection of a former intimate Christian intercourse, exhilarates his drooping soul by the particulars of what King Jesus does among the wild Virginians. I settled, about seven years ago,

* Philadelphia Library.

† Dwight's Life of Edwards.

‡ Dr. Foote.

§ Bellamy papers.

|| Ibid.

about the middle of James and Roanoke Rivers, in a very scattered congregation, and among a very ignorant people, destitute of any kind of religious knowledge, though mostly of the Church-of-England persuasion. Upon my first preaching here, they were awakened and awfully alarmed; and, in about nine weeks, many got engaged in a most solemn manner for my settlement with them, and promised me a decent maintenance: which invitation I accepted before Newcastle Presbytery; and I may say, to the praise of a good and a gracious God, that we never saw the natural spring since but 'the Day-spring from on high hath visited us.'

"I preached here first in March, 1754, and completely settled the October following. On the last Sabbath of the succeeding July, I received to the Lord's table about one hundred souls—mostly from the Church of England—who were never communicants before. Thirteen months after, I received about ninety more; and, at every sacrament since, an addition has been made, on a moderate calculation, of about thirty; and I always have two sacraments in a year. But this spring and summer exceeded all the seasons I have been acquainted with, in Virginia, for conviction and conversion: the work is more universal and powerful.

"Religion seemed to be sunk exceeding low, while its enemies were very lively, hoping there was now no God in Israel, and even the children of the kingdom drooping through unbelief. I was full of fears myself, lest we had provoked the Holy One of Israel to depart from us forever; but even then the stability of the covenant, and his unchanging regard to his own glory, propped my tottering faith, and led me to preach in another channel. The gospel was almost a new thing to myself and my hearers, insomuch that I could say it was good for us to be afflicted with discouraging fears. People grew more and more engaged, and sinners were awaked in an uncommon manner and degree; and what supported my hopes was, I could see the Sun of righteousness shining upon the negro quarter in the darkest and stormiest part of our spiritual winter. When the revival began, it spread more powerfully among the blacks than the whites, so that they crowded to me in great numbers, solemnly engaged and deeply affected, to know what they should do to be saved. I received to communion, between the second Sabbath in June and the first in August, above one hundred souls, among whom were forty-six negroes.

"Our enemies were exceedingly confounded, and the children of the kingdom exceedingly humbled,—consequently, more joyful and highly exalted than ever. A great number were then ambitious to become *New Lights*, who before hated and scorned the

name. Some of our bitterest enemies were conquered, and made willing to deny themselves and take the cross.

"About five years ago I baptized some few negroes,* and they kept dropping in one after another, till, about two years ago, I had fifteen admitted to communion. At this time, I baptized two leading fellows of one Colonel Cary, who has now twenty slaves in full communion in our church. The work has ever since been spreading among that gentleman's slaves, and others round; and I believe there are now about three hundred Ethiopians solicitously engaged after the great salvation. Could I solemnize the Lord's Supper in the centre of my congregation this fall, I might have hopefully one hundred black converts at the table. I have now above one hundred catechumens under examination for baptism, besides fifty or more I baptized since last May.

"1. When I came first here, there was not a shadow of a congregation. Mr. Davies, Robinson, Cumming, James Finley, Brown, Davenport, and Henry preached a few sermons in their *transitu*, and, I suppose, there might be four or five pious souls in all my bounds when I came; and yet, amidst the whole of the work, there has been scarcely any tincture of enthusiasm. The Lord kept the converts low by a constant view of their own hearts, so that they were rather tempted to unreasonable diffidence, than, like the Separates, inclined to go and preach to others.

"2. Those who were first taken among the whites, though none of the grandees, were yet accounted responsible, honest people; and, when the husband or wife was awakened, the same ordinarily happened to his or her consort, unless in few instances, and there the person exercised was uncommonly supported under the trial of the other's opposition, and the trial generally was not long.

"3. Those among the negroes who were first baptized were the most honest, upright, leading men among their tribes, which greatly contributed to spread religion among their fellow-slaves; and their masters, overseers, and stewards generally fell in with religion beyond all expectation, and thereby they were greatly encouraged.

"4. The opposition has been, and still is, violently strong, but

* "I am a member of a society in London, which lays out a large sum of money every year in books to be distributed *gratis* among the poor. When I published the arrival of my nomination of books, I called upon the negroes to accept of them all. Few of them became scholars, but they seemed exceedingly attentive and affected on receiving the books. The work spread amazingly among them. Last year I had nine hundred and forty-eight books, this year eleven hundred and fifty-five. This, in the hand of a gracious Providence, with the prayers of a great number of very holy souls in and about London, is the cause of this glorious work among them."

does not hinder or retard the work: it enters into their families, and takes hold of their children, husbands, and wives.

"5. There are as few apostasies as ever I knew in a work of grace of so large an extent, among uncultivated souls."

Wright was installed in Cumberland by Davies and Henry. "At the sacrament on the last Sabbath in July, 1755, two thousand were present: there were one hundred and eighty communicants, eighty being new ones. There were general awakenings for sundry Sabbaths before, and new instances of deep and rational conviction. In August, of a Lord's day, I saw above a hundred weeping and trembling under the word." Davies said, in the next summer, "Wright's labours continue to be blest." There was more of the power of God that spring, summer, and autumn, than ever. There were remarkable revivings in Davies's congregation, among the negroes; in Henry's, among the young: in Wright's it was general, but eminently among the young. "After the sacrament in September, I don't know that there were two unaffected hearts in my congregation. On the third Sabbath in November, there was a special outpouring of the Holy Spirit; Christ triumphed among us; convictions were more deep and pungent than formerly."

In the middle of May, 1757, Wright preached at Willis Creek from Acts xvii. 30, having had no success before, and thought it would be the beginning of better days. Having been sickly through the spring, he relapsed in June: Martin and Henry assisted him at the sacrament. On Friday, a congregation assembled, and he ventured to talk from "*All things are ready.*" This was a word in season to saint and sinner. "We had a prelibation of what followed. Henry preached from Rev. xxii. 17. I never saw the cross of Christ triumph as then. One B. W. had been three years under temptation.

" 'Such miserables as I,' said he, on Friday, 'have no place at the Lord's table.'

" 'Are you then willing to give up all your part and portion in Christ?'

" 'No; not for a thousand worlds.'

"On Sabbath, Wright took him aside, and gave him a token, which he accepted with great reluctance. In fencing the first table, he saw this poor object, and, going to him with the bread, he said,—

" 'I cannot take; I feel no faith.'

" 'But don't you want Christ?'

" 'Yes; but I am not worthy of him.'

" 'Are you not ready?'

" 'I am lost without him.'

" 'Are you not labouring and heavy laden?'

" 'I am crushed under the load of sin.'

“ ‘Then Christ calls you by name to come to him.’

“He took the bread, and stood up. Being a tall man, he was seen by all, as, stretching out his hands, with the most affecting countenance, he said, ‘Lord Jesus, I am lost without thee. I come trembling. I would fain be a partaker of thy broken body; for I am undone without thee. Lord Jesus, have mercy on me!’ ”

No spectator can ever forget that solemn transaction between Christ and that poor sinner. The whole day was “one of the days of the Son of man.” Thirty-six new communicants were received.

He was a correspondent of the publisher of the “Glasgow Christian History,” and, it is said, of John Wesley also.

And must this glowing account of zealous labours and great success end abruptly with the statement, that Wright was suspended, by Hanover Presbytery, in 1763, and never restored?

THE CHURCH IN NEW YORK.

THE synod received, in September, 1758, a letter* from Pemberton, of New York, informing them that, owing to dissensions in his charge, his hope of usefulness was gone, and that a unanimous call from a congregation in Boston was ready to be placed in his hands. He desired that a committee might be sent to New York without delay to issue the business. Several members of the congregation made a representation of their divided state; and a committee was appointed, with full powers to do as they judge necessary for the healing of divisions and for the best interests of religion there. Tennent, of Freehold, with his elder, Samuel Ker, Burr, Beatty, Bostwick, Spencer, and Caleb Smith, met in the city, October 24. No opposition was made to the dismissal of Cumming; but, being sensible of the many difficulties Pemberton laboured under, they allowed him a month’s time to make a further trial, and left him at liberty then to remove or abide, as he saw best.

During the month, even the gentlemen who were fearful that his departure would endanger the peace of the congregation were satisfied that he should go; and, on the joint recommendation of Pemberton and Cumming, the congregation (November 19) sent

* MS. Records of the Trustees of the Congregation.

† The letter was signed by Nathaniel Hazard, James Jauncey, John Smith, Joseph Forman, and Nathaniel McKinley.