

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.

---

Entered according to Act of Congress, in the year 1857, by  
JOSEPH M. WILSON,  
in the Clerk's Office of the District Court of the United States for the Eastern District of  
Pennsylvania.

---

STEREOTYPED BY L. JOHNSON & CO.  
PHILADELPHIA.

---

1751, and was directed to supply Buffalo settlement, and the adjacent places, four Sabbaths; he also visited Hies, Eno, and Haw River, in North Carolina.

He took charge of the congregations of Rockfish and Mountain Plain before 1752. In 1759, he attended synod, and vainly sought to have a presbytery formed west of the Blue Ridge.

Hanover Presbytery decided that the people in Woods's Gap, in the mountains of Albemarle, were not in his bounds, and erected them into the congregation of Albemarle. They dismissed him from his charge, July 18, 1759.

He died August 9, 1770. The presbytery style him "an aged minister."

---

## FRANCIS ALISON,

BORN in Ireland, in 1705, studied at the University of Glasgow, and came as a probationer to this country in 1734 or '35.

On the recommendation of Franklin,\* he was employed by John Dickinson, of Delaware, the author of the "Farmer's Letters," as the tutor of his son. Leave to take a few other pupils was granted; and he is said to have had an academy at Thunder Hill, Maryland.†

The commission, in 1736, wrote to him to officiate as a supply for the new erection in Philadelphia. He was ordained pastor of New London by Newcastle Presbytery before May, 1737.

He was a correspondent of President Stiles, who has preserved many of his letters. He says, he commenced his school in 1743; and Professor Hutcheson, of Glasgow, having, in 1746, advised the setting on foot of a seminary by the synod, he also opened a correspondence with him. The synod, failing in their attempt to endow a college, did what was in their power, and took the New London school under their patronage. They gave Alison twenty pounds, (Pennsylvania currency,) with the liberty of choosing an assistant at a salary of fifteen pounds. In 1748, the salaries were raised; one to forty pounds, and the other to twenty pounds.

Alison complained to Donegal Presbytery, that Alexander Craighead had intruded into his congregation, "to rend and divide it against his mind, the mind of the session, and the declared opinion of the congregation in general."

---

\* Joshua Edwards, Esq.

† Watson's Annals of Philadelphia.

He signed the Protest; but he agreed with the New York brethren in demanding that the whole proceeding should be reviewed in 1742; and he entered his dissent from the vote refusing this request. Though foremost on the Old Side, it does not appear that any of his congregation deserted him. In 1744,\* they erected the largest church in that region. The building was sixty-three feet long by thirty-eight wide, with long, low, brick walls, an antique, Swedish, or hipped roof. The side of the edifice was turned to the road; and it had arched doors and windows, with imported leaden sashes. The pulpit was on the side; and the pews were of forms, patterns, and colours as diverse as the tastes and the incomes of their respective owners.

In 1749, he was invited to Philadelphia, a grammar-school having been opened in that city by subscription. He asked leave of the synod to sit as a member of Philadelphia Presbytery: they declined, and promised him thirty pounds for educating their beneficiaries, with liberty to charge at his pleasure for the tuition of others. The grammar-school in Philadelphia was incorporated in 1750, endowed in 1753, and erected into a college in 1755. Alison left New London before May, 1752, without consulting presbytery or synod; but this was excused, owing to the pressing circumstances of his position. He took charge of the grammar-school, and became colleague to Cross. Among his elders who sat with him in synod were the Hon. Charles Thomson and Mr. William Humphreys.

He was made vice-provost of the college in 1755; and Nassau Hall gave him the degree of A.M. in 1756, and the University of Glasgow created him doctor of divinity in 1756. He was the first of our ministers who received that honour; and the Synod of Philadelphia returned their thanks, for the favour, to the University.†

On the union of the synods, May 24, 1758, he preached from Eph. iv. 4-7. The sermon was published, with the title, "Peace and Union recommended," and a note, suggesting that, as in the perusal it might to many seem long, they may conveniently divide it by pausing at the twenty-eighth page.

He went, with Colonel Burd, as chaplain to the expedition to Fort Cumberland, and remained from August to November.

Together with Gilbert Tennent and the Presbyterians generally, who were headed by Chief-Justice Allen, (father-in-law of Governor John Penn,) he opposed the throwing off of the Pro-

\* Dubois's Historical Discourse at New London.

† The diploma was transmitted to him through the Rev. James Moody, of Newry.—*Philadelphia Newspaper*.



prietary Government; and, as a reward\* for his services in that matter, Richard Penn gave Alison the splendid tract of one thousand acres at the confluence of the Bald Eagle with the West Branch of the Susquehanna.

He was the efficient agent in the establishment of the Widows Fund in our church; and was wisely active in the convention with the Connecticut ministers to withstand the gradual but determined innovations of Churchmen and the Crown on our liberties as citizens and Christians.

Among his correspondents† were Dr. Gordon, of Stepney, England; William Boyd, minister of Taughboyne, in Ireland, (who visited New England in 1718,) and John Holmes, of Glendernot, both able and zealous advocates for the subscription of the Westminster Confession; and James Moody, of Newry, who differed with them on that point.

Alison was so much pleased with Connecticut that at one time he thought of making it the retreat of his old age. Probably some hint of this induced the people of New London, who had remained vacant since his removal, to send Elijah McClenachan and William Montgomery as commissioners to the Second Philadelphia Presbytery, with a call for him, August 14, 1765. He took it under consideration, and returned it, November 26, 1766.

Although his family could ill afford it, he set free his slaves by will: "the good man‡ followed the dictates of his conscience, leaving his widow to Providence."

He died, November 28, 1779, aged seventy-four. His wife was an Armitage. He left a son (a physician, at Fagg's Manor) and two daughters: one of his sons died before him, at the age of twenty-eight.

Among his pupils were Charles Thomson, Secretary of the Continental Congress, Dr. Ewing, of Philadelphia, Dr. Latta, of Chestnut Level, Matthew Wilson, of Lewes, Hugh Williamson, and David Ramsay, the historian of North and South Carolina, and three signers of the Declaration of Independence,—Governor McKean, George Read, and James Smith. He had the reputation§ of being the best Latin scholar in America. Bishop White was one of his pupils, and, in his "Memoirs," speaks of him as a man of unquestionable ability in his department, of real and

\* Day's Historical Collections of Pennsylvania. But Judge Huston says that the lands of the West Branch were laid out for officers of first and second battalions of regiment under Colonel Boquet. Fifteen hundred acres on west side of the mouth of Bald Eagle were conveyed to Dr. Alison, February 4, 1769, and were paid for in full, April 3, 1772.—*Land Titles.*

† Stiles's MSS., Yale College.

‡ Philadelphia Newspaper.

§ Morgan Edwards.

rational piety; with a proneness to anger, which was forgotten in his placableness and affability. Davies speaks of him to Cowell as "our learned friend."

---

## DAVID COWELL

WAS born in Dorchester, Massachusetts, in 1704, graduated at Harvard in 1732, and came as a licentiate to Trenton, N.J., in 1736. Trenton, which had formed a part of Hopewell, asked Philadelphia Presbytery, in September, 1734, to provide them a minister. In the next fall, Cowell began his labours there. On his receiving a call,\* the presbytery examined him on his religious principles and sentiments, heard him preach from Rom. iii. 25, and, after a sermon by Andrews, ordained him, November 3, 1736.

A debate was maintained between him and Gilbert Tennent on a most important matter: namely, Whether a motive, to which the natural man is susceptible, a regard to what he sees to be on the whole most for his interest, is acceptable with God when it leads one to embrace Christ's salvation and God's service? Cowell disclaimed the affirmative, which Tennent charged him with holding, and probably was equally unwilling to admit that our obedience to God is worthless if we be influenced by a desire for our own salvation as well as the glory of God.

He took no part at the division in 1741; but he was fully opposed to the extreme measures of the Brunswick party. He remained with the Old Side; but his intercourse with the New York brethren, and his intimate friendship with Burr, was not interrupted.

In 1749, the commissions of both synods met at Trenton, to treat about a union. Cowell was chosen moderator; but, a heated discussion arising about the Protest, they broke up, unanimously agreeing that each synod more fully prepare proposals of reconciliation, and that there be in the mean time a mutual endeavour to cultivate candour and friendship.

He was an early, an ardent, and an indefatigable friend of New Jersey College, and unwearied in his efforts to place Davies in the presidency. He wrote to him, † "The college ought to be

---

\* It is dated April 7, 1736, and is in the hands of Mr. J. V. Cowell.

† MSS. in the possession of Mr. Joseph V. Cowell, of Philadelphia. Davies