

ANNALS

OF THE

AMERICAN PULPIT;

OR

COMMEMORATIVE NOTICES

OF

DISTINGUISHED AMERICAN CLERGYMEN

OF

VARIOUS DENOMINATIONS

FROM THE EARLY SETTLEMENT OF THE COUNTRY TO THE CLOSE OF THE YEAR  
EIGHTEEN HUNDRED AND FIFTY-FIVE.

WITH HISTORICAL INTRODUCTIONS.

BY WILLIAM B. SPRAGUE, D. D.

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## ABRAHAM ANDERSON, D.D.\*

1821—1855.

ABRAHAM ANDERSON was born near Neuville, in Cumberland County, Pa., on the 7th of December, 1789. He was a son of Abraham and Elizabeth Anderson, both of whom emigrated from the North of Ireland, a few months before his birth. His mother originally belonged to the Associate Church, and his father to the Presbyterian Church of Ireland; though, previous to his leaving Ireland, he had transferred his relation to the Associate Body. He (the son) remained at home, labouring upon his father's farm, until he had reached early manhood. During the war of 1812 he was called out with the militia under General Harrison; and, while thus engaged, he not only gained credit as a soldier, but uniformly exhibited the most exemplary deportment. His Sabbaths were spent in reading his Bible and some other religious books which he had taken with him; and that copy of the Bible he always kept and cherished with most reverential care. On his return home from his tour of military duty, in 1813, he immediately commenced his preparation for the ministry. Without any previous course of study, he entered Jefferson College, where they were accustomed, at that time, to receive students before they had yet begun the study of the Classics. He remained there four years, and graduated in 1817, having been distinguished through his whole course for diligent application and excellent scholarship.

Immediately after leaving College he commenced the study of Theology under the Rev. Dr. John Anderson, who was at that time the Theological Professor in the Associate Church. He continued with him one session, (five months,) and then studied under the general direction of the Presbytery three years; at the same time prosecuting a course of medical study under the direction of Dr. Letherman, one of the most eminent physicians in that part of the country. He was chosen Professor of Languages in Jefferson College in 1818, and accepted the office and retained it until 1821. In October, 1821, he was licensed to preach; and, after itinerating, about two months, in Pennsylvania and the Eastern part of Ohio, he went, by appointment of Synod, into the Southern States, and was very soon settled over the Congregations of Steele Creek and Bethany, Mecklenberg County, N. C. After remaining here about ten years, during which time he exerted a highly beneficial influence, not only upon his own immediate congregations, but throughout the whole extent of the Presbytery,—his health had suffered so much, from the effect of the climate, that he found it necessary to seek a Northern residence; though he resolved to remain until a suitable person could be found to succeed him. In 1831 an Act was passed in the Synod of the Associate Church, requiring the excommunication of all slaveholders; which, whatever might have been his views of the subject, he knew he should be unable to carry out. Having received an appointment from the Synod to visit certain churches at the North, he visited Hebron, Washington County, N. Y.; and, as he did not think it prudent to return immediately, on account of the prevalence of the cholera, he remained and preached at Hebron for some time. After he returned to the South, in the

\* Communication from himself.—Evangelical Repository, 1855.

autumn of 1832, the congregation at Hebron sent a call after him; and the fact of a person's having been found to succeed him, in connection with the embarrassment occasioned by the Synodical Act on Slavery, led him to accept it. He, accordingly, returned to Hebron in the summer of 1833, and settled there. He held the Pastoral relation to that church fourteen years and a half. In the autumn of 1847 he was elected Professor in the Theological Seminary of the Associate Church at Canonsburg, as successor to the Rev. Dr. Martin. This post, in connection with the Professorship Extraordinary of Hebrew in Jefferson College, and the collegiate charge of the Congregation of Miller's Run, he held till the close of life.

The disease, which terminated his life, was an inward inflammation, which had troubled him for many years. It was not, however, till within a few months of his death that it began seriously to interfere with his stated labours. In December, 1854, he found it necessary to cease from the exercise of his ministry, in the Congregation of Miller's Run, and to devolve the whole care of it on his colleague, the Rev. Dr. Beveridge. He still attended, though often with much pain, to his duties in the Seminary, and preached frequently on Sabbath evening. His condition for many weeks had seemed alternately more and less hopeful, until the 29th of April, 1855, when there was a decisive change that indicated that the time of his departure could not be distant. His sufferings in his last days were intense, insomuch that he was prevented from engaging much in conversation; but his mind was evidently in a tranquil and trusting state, and those who saw him die were fully persuaded that he felt nothing of death's sting or death's terrors. He died on the 9th of May, and was buried the next day at Chartiers, beside the graves of his parents.

The degree of Doctor of Divinity was conferred upon him by Franklin College, Ohio, in the autumn of 1846.

He was married at Salem, Washington County, N. Y., on the 9th of October, 1832, to Mary, daughter of John and Eliza Law. They had one child only, a daughter, who is married.

Dr. Anderson's publications are

A Circular to the Churches in the Carolinas, about 1824; a Sermon on Covenanting, published in the Philadelphia Repository; and a Criticism on a Decision in a Church Case, given by a Judge in Vermont.

I had the pleasure of a slight acquaintance with Dr. Anderson, having met him during a meeting of the Associate Synod in Albany a few years before his death. I was impressed by his grave and dignified appearance, and by the evidence he gave, in all his conversation, of a sound, well balanced and well cultivated mind. He seemed especially at home in talking about the distinguished men in his denomination who had passed away, and evidently cherished their memories with great reverence. He also kindly communicated to me an account of the leading events of his own life, of which I preserved written memoranda that I have availed myself of in writing the present sketch.

FROM THE REV. W. M. McELWEE. D.D.

FRANKFORT SPRINGS, BROWN COUNTY, Pa., April 4, 1859.

Rev. and dear Brother: My acquaintance with Dr. Abraham Anderson commenced in September, 1822, while he was delivering his Ordination trials before the Presbytery of the Carolinas, and was afterwards cultivated in long

journeyings with him to and from several meetings of the Associate Synod; in many meetings of the Carolina Presbytery; in many meetings to dispense the Lord's Supper; in several meetings as delegates to the Convention of Reformed Churches; in many meetings of the Theological Board; in almost numberless meetings in our respective habitations, both in the South and in the North; and by a somewhat extended friendly correspondence. The acquaintance for which Providence afforded such ample opportunity soon ripened into the most intimate and cordial friendship,—a friendship which never suffered the least interruption or abatement during his lifetime, and in which I confidently expect that we shall mutually rejoice amidst the scenes beyond the veil.

Dr. Anderson's exterior was large, massive and comely; and though large bodies and little souls are often conjoined, in his case the glory within was equal or superior to the expectations inspired by the outward form. He was able to accomplish much in a little time. What time he usually employed in preparing for the Sabbath I know not; but, if an emergency required it, he could collect and arrange the materials of a sermon in a very brief period. He was not so remarkable, however, for the activity of his mental operations as for the compass and extent of his mental vision. Whatever subject he had occasion to handle, he seemed to rise above it, and to view all its different sides at once, with all the objections which might be brought against the view which he maintained. An elderly man in the South, connected with the Old School Presbyterian General Assembly, heard Dr. Anderson occasionally, and compared him to a great ploughshare, which makes a wide furrow and buries all the weeds out of sight.

To a strong, well balanced mind were added, in the case of Dr. Anderson, a habit of great diligence, and the art of gathering up fragments of time and bits of opportunity and turning them to some good account. It does not appear that he kept a Diary; but he kept a note book in which he recorded, with some remarks, any text by which his mind was impressed in reading; and when his reflections did not lead him to fix on any particular subject for the Sabbath, he had recourse to this storehouse for assistance.

To an industrious spirit was added the love of order. His books and papers were kept in their proper places. The different parts of his apparel were properly disposed, and his expenditures were not suffered to flow out at random. He noted in a little book the incomes and outlays of the year; and, at the end of the year, marked the paper and laid it by, and began anew. Indeed, the love of order was conspicuous in every thing about him—in his garden, yard and stable, as well as in his dwelling.

The result of his well directed industry was a large store of varied information. He could read a Latin system of Divinity almost as freely as he could read English. He was so familiar with the Greek of the New Testament that, in family worship, he was accustomed to read the chapter directly from the original. He had a good acquaintance with the Hebrew of the Old Testament, and with Ancient and Modern History, and with the principles of our Republican Government and of the Common Law. He was a good Physician, in all ordinary cases, and not ignorant of Chemistry, nor of Agriculture or Architecture. He was a man of excellent common sense, and was much at home amidst the details of practical life.

He was distinguished for humility and patience. He thought it no degradation to leave his seat in College, and ride through the country, preaching the Gospel to the poor and ignorant; and, when settled in a pastoral charge, he was not above preaching from house to house or of ministering to the humblest child of sorrow. He was full of zeal and full of kindness. When, in the commencement of my ministry, I told him of any difficulty, or discouragement,

ment, or cause of perplexity, however trifling the thing was, he never made light of it, but listened with fixed attention; and, when he had comprehended the case, he set himself to render me the desired assistance as promptly and as earnestly as if I had been his own son. When I first saw him, his lofty head and stern countenance led me to doubt whether there was much of tenderness in his nature; but an intimate acquaintance with him revealed to me a heart full of the most generous and kindly sympathy.

He was remarkable for sincerity and magnanimity. If he had proposed a measure to the Presbytery or Synod, and a brother proposed something better, he would abandon his own proposal and urge the substitute. He did nothing through strife or vain glory. He never spoke that others might hear how well he could speak, nor continued to harangue and reason for the sake of victory. I never witnessed the semblance of envy or jealousy in any thing that he said or did, either in public or private.

Dr. Anderson was as far as possible from any thing like levity. He was cheerful and affable, and would sometimes laugh heartily, but his ordinary habit of mind was grave. I remember to have heard him relate but one really laughable story, and that was somewhat at his own expense.

He was a highly acceptable and useful Preacher. Though he was a large and strong man, such was his bodily organization that he could speak only in a conversational tone; but, as his pronunciation was very distinct, he could still be heard with ease by a large assembly. It must be stated further that he had this mental peculiarity—while his memory readily grasped and retained ideas, he had less ability than the generality of men to remember and repeat sentences. At the beginning of his ministry, he wrote his sermons at full length, as young ministers of the Associate Church generally do; but it took him a whole week to commit a sermon, and, after so much labour, he was hampered in the delivery. He concluded, after a few trials, that if he could preach only in this way, it would be necessary for him to abandon the ministry. The plan which he finally adopted was that of writing the heads and particular divisions, with a few sentences under each division, indicating the course of thought to be pursued; and, in this way, he very soon came to preach with ease and comfort. The matter of his discourses was solid and rich, but the language and style of delivery were plain and simple. The body of his sermon was usually argumentative, but in the close he almost uniformly made an impressive appeal to the conscience.

He was, I think, even more distinguished on the floor of Synod than in the pulpit. In a time of excitement, his calm, dignified mien and gentle voice were as oil on the troubled waters. When darkness brooded over the Assembly, and many were unable to see the point at issue, his cool, luminous statement of the matter in question would often dissipate the darkness, and give to the discussion a new and better direction. He was eminently fitted for the chair of Didactic and Polemic Theology. His great intellectual ability and solid learning, his dignified appearance and admirable propriety of conduct, his condescending kindness and unflinching patience, made him all that could be desired in that important post.

Yours with great respect and sincere affection,

W. M. McELWEE.

FROM THE REV. ROBERT BAIRD, D.D.

NEW YORK, January 3, 1863.

My dear Dr. Sprague: am sure you will find it easy to obtain a more satisfactory account of the late Dr. Abraham Anderson than I am able to give you, and yet my recollections of him are very distinct, and my opportu-

nities for forming a judgment of his character were not inconsiderable. I knew him first as Professor in Jefferson College, during the latter part of my course in that institution; and, though he was appointed to the Professorship immediately after he was graduated, it was universally conceded that he was well fitted for the place, and acquitted himself in it with high honour. I knew him at a later period, when he had returned to Cannonsburg as Professor in the Theological Seminary; for, though I did not myself, at that time, reside there, I was there as an occasional visitor, and took care never to lose an opportunity of visiting Dr. Anderson. What he was as a Professor in the Seminary I had no means of knowing, except from report; but the uniform testimony, so far as I know, was, that he possessed high qualifications for his department, and was eminently acceptable and useful.

Dr. Anderson's mind was calm, reflective, discriminating, logical, rather than highly imaginative. No matter what might be the subject that occupied him, he held it to his mind till he had made himself master of it in its different bearings and proportions. His intellectual powers were marked by great sobriety and harmony—he did not view things in an exaggerated form—as the simple truth, so far as it came within the range of his faculties, was the object at which he aimed, so he generally attained it by the simplest and most natural process. As his mind was one of great activity, and his habits were essentially industrious, it was to be expected that he would have large mental acquisitions; and no one could be well acquainted with him without perceiving that this expectation was fully realized. He seemed almost equally at home in the Languages, the Mathematics, Intellectual Philosophy and Logic; and though he made no show of his attainments, they were all at his command, as so much well adjusted intellectual furniture.

Dr. Anderson was a man of a kindly and benevolent spirit, and always ready to confer a favour whenever it was in his power, though he was perhaps the opposite of demonstrative. He never said or did any thing merely for effect. In the ordinary intercourse of society, he was rather inclined to be reserved, though, with his intimate friends, he was delightfully free and communicative. His religious character was pure, elevated, consistent, without the least approach to any thing that savoured of enthusiasm. I do not remember ever to have heard him preach; but his reputation as a Preacher was just what you would expect from the general character which I have ascribed to him—his sermons were sensible, logical, and highly evangelical, and better fitted, in respect to both matter and manner, to interest and edify the thoughtful and intelligent hearer than to powerfully impress and bear away the multitude. He had great influence in Church Courts, not only from his general weight of character, but from his familiarity with the usages of such Bodies, and his facility at public business. He had, throughout the whole community, the reputation of a wise, learned, unostentatious, excellent man. His death was felt to be a calamity far beyond the limits of his own denomination.

I am, my dear Dr. Sprague,

Ever yours most truly,

R. BAIRD.