

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.

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## DAVID BOSTWICK.\*

1745—1763.

DAVID BOSTWICK was grandson to John Bostwick, who was of Scotch extraction, but came from Cheshire, England, to Stratford, Conn., about the year 1668, and subsequently removed, with a numerous family, to New Milford, of which he was one of the first settlers. The father of David Bostwick was Major John Bostwick, who was a deacon of the church, and was elected eighteen times (the elections being then semi-annual) as a Representative of the town to the General Assembly of the State. David was born at New Milford on the 8th of January, 1721. Dr. Miller, in his *Life of Dr. Rodgers*, states that, "at the age of fifteen, he entered Yale College, and graduated after the usual course of study." As, however, his name does not appear on the catalogue, it is presumed that this is partly a mistake: the Hon. David S. Boardman, who is a remote relative of Mr. Bostwick, after having explored every source of information on the subject, says,—“My belief is (and I have very little doubt of its correctness) that he was, for the greatest part of a college course, a member of Yale Collego; and that he finished his academical, and commenced and probably completed his theological, course, with a somewhat eminent Scotch scholar and divine in Southbury, (then part of Woodbury,) by the name of Graham. I am strengthened in this belief by the fact of Mr. Bostwick's having married a Miss Hinman of that place; with whom he probably became acquainted while a student.” Previous to his engaging in the active duties of the ministry, he was, for some time, a teacher in an Academy at Newark, N. J., under the care of the Rev. (afterwards President) Aaron Burr. On the 9th of October, 1745, he was ordained to the work of the ministry, and installed pastor of the church in Jamaica, L. I. The Sermon on the occasion was preached by Mr. Burr, and was published. Here Mr. Bostwick remained more than ten years, in great repute, among not only his own people, but his brethren in the ministry, and the surrounding churches.

In July, 1755, the First Presbyterian Church in New York,—having become vacant by the removal of Mr. Cumming and Mr. Pemberton, who had been colleague pastors, gave a call to Mr. Bostwick, a member of their own Presbytery, to fill the vacancy. The people of Jamaica, who highly appreciated his character and services, strongly opposed his removal; and the church in New York being agitated with dissensions, especially on the subject of Church Psalmody, he was little predisposed to take a step that should put at hazard his own peace and comfort as a minister. The Presbytery, when the call was laid before them, referred the matter to the Synod, which was to meet in Newark in September following. The Synod appointed a committee to meet at Jamaica, a few weeks after, that they might deliberate on the subject under circumstances more favourable to their arriving at a correct conclusion. At the meeting of the committee, a memorial was presented from the elders, deacons, and trustees of the church in New York, earnestly praying that they would not only put the call into

\* Smith's Hist. N. Y.—Miller's Life of Rodgers.—Preface to Bostwick's "Rational Vindication," &c.—MS. from Hon. D. S. Boardman.

Mr. Bostwick's hands, and encourage him to accept it, but that they would also take some measures for the settlement of the existing controversy in the congregation respecting the use of Watts' Psalms. The committee, however, were divided in regard to both the call and the question concerning Psalmody; and, instead of coming to any decision upon either, they determined to refer both questions to the regular Commission of Synod, which they requested the Moderator to convene without unnecessary loss of time. The Commission accordingly met at Princeton, on the 14th of April, 1756; when the call was put into Mr. Bostwick's hands; but, as he declared himself at a loss as to his duty in respect to it, the Commission, after having heard full representations on the subject from both New York and Jamaica, decided in favour of his removal to New York. Mr. Bostwick acquiesced in the decision; and his pastoral relation to the church of Jamaica was accordingly dissolved. He had previously, during his residence at Jamaica, rejected several calls from other churches; and he evidently went to New York, not without many misgivings and considerable reluctance.

Mr. Bostwick was installed shortly after, and about the same time removed his family to the city. But though he was unusually popular in the congregation, the controversy in respect to Psalmody was not quieted, and, after a few months, the brethren who were dissatisfied with the introduction of Watts, withdrew, and formed a distinct church, of which the Rev. (afterwards Dr.) John Mason became the pastor. This secession left the congregation in an harmonious state, and rendered Mr. Bostwick's labours far more easy and agreeable.

In 1760, Mr. Bostwick was laid aside for some time by ill health. Dr. Wheelock was then meditating the removal of his Indian School from Lebanon, and he wrote to Mr. Bostwick to enlist his aid in the enterprise. Mr. B. assured him of his good wishes on the subject, and promised him his aid, if he should ever have health enough to attempt any further labour; but he seemed to think that his health and even life were too uncertain to justify much reliance upon his efforts. After this, however, he so far regained his health, as to be able to attend to his ordinary pastoral duties.

In May, 1762, the Congregation purchased a parsonage, and gave the use of it to Mr. Bostwick, as an addition to his stated salary. As they had no charter, they were obliged to convey this property to certain individuals to be held in trust.

In the autumn of this year, (1762,) Mr. Bostwick being too feeble to discharge all the duties demanded of a pastor by so large a congregation, the Rev. Joseph Treat,\* a member of the Presbytery of New Brunswick, was associated with him in his pastoral charge. But Mr. Bostwick's course was now nearly finished. He died after a severe illness of a few days, November 12, 1763, aged forty-three years.

He published a Sermon preached at Philadelphia before the Reverend Synod of New York, entitled "Self disclaimed and Christ exalted, 1758, which was reprinted in London, 1776; also "an Account of the life, charac-

\* JOSEPH TREAT, was graduated at the College of New Jersey in 1757; was a Tutor in the College from 1758 to 1760; was licensed to preach by the Presbytery of New Brunswick in 1760; and retained his connection as pastor with the Presbyterian church in New York till 1784, when, in pursuance of an application to the Presbytery by the congregation, it was dissolved. In 1785, the Presbytery of New York report that they had, during the preceding year, dismissed Mr. Treat to the Presbytery of New Brunswick; but I find no further trace of him.

ter and death of President Davies," prefixed to Davies' Sermon on the death of George II, 1761. After his death, there was published from his manuscripts "A fair and rational Vindication of the Right of infants to the ordinance of Baptism; being the substance of several Discourses from Acts ii. 39." This Tract was reprinted in London, and a second American edition of it was printed in 1837.

The degree of Master of Arts was conferred on Mr. Bostwick by the College of New Jersey, in 1756; and he was one of the overseers of the same institution from 1761 till his death.

Mr. Bostwick had a numerous family of children,—four sons and six daughters, all of whom lived to adult years. One of his sons (*Andrew*) was a Colonel in the Revolutionary war. One of his daughters married General McDougall of the Continental army, and afterwards the Rev. Azel Roe; and another married General Roberdeau, a member of the old Congress from 1777 to 1779.

The Hon. David S. Boardman of New Milford, says of him—"His traditional reputation as a preacher, as derived from the old people of this place, who occasionally heard him preach, when visiting his relations here, was very high."

The Hon. William Smith, in his History of New York, which was published in 1757, in speaking of Mr. Bostwick, says,—

"He is a gentleman of a mild, catholic disposition; and being a man of piety, prudence, and zeal, confines himself entirely to the proper business of his functions. In the art of preaching, he is one of the most distinguished clergymen in these parts. His discourses are methodical, sound and pathetic; in sentiment and in point of diction, singularly ornamented. He delivers himself without notes, and yet with great ease and fluency of expression; and performs every part of Divine worship with a striking solemnity."

The following notice of Mr. Bostwick's character is from the Preface to his Treatise on Baptism, which was published the year immediately succeeding his death. It is anonymous, but was evidently written by one who knew him well.—

"But though Mr. Bostwick's superior talents for the work of the ministry had spread his praises in the Gospel throughout these Western churches, yet he was personally known (comparatively) to but few; his fixed charge having always confined him within the verge of his incumbent duty, and his great humility and entire freedom from all ostentation ever concealed him as much from public view, as eminency of his station would permit. But as he is now no more, and some strictures of his person and character may be agreeable to many of the distant readers of this treatise, they may be pleased to take them briefly thus.

"As a man, he was something above middle stature, comely and well-set, his aspect grave and venerable; formed by nature with a clear understanding, quick apprehension, prompt elocution, and solid judgment; his imagination strong and lively, and his memory very tenacious. Of all these he gave the most convincing proofs, both in public and private life.

"He directed the course of his studies in a close and intimate subserviency to the great business of his profession. *En toutois isthi* [1 Tim. iv. 15] might have been his motto. In Divinity his great strength lay. He had an admirable discerning of truth and error, in their causes, connections, and consequences; and believed and taught the pure doctrines of Christianity, as contained in the Holy Scriptures, and as declared in the public Confessions of the Reformed Churches, in their original and genuine meaning. He beheld his Bible with reverence, as the grand charter of life eternal. He knew it to be a revelation from God, and the most wonderful Book in the world. He saw its external and internal evidence, by Nature's light, aided by human learning, and by a special illumination from above. He beheld the majesty, glory, reality, and importance of the subject of it; discerning therein an admirable display of the infinite perfections of the Deity, with a perfect accommodation to the various states of man. He considered it not only as a system of Divine knowledge, but as revealing a practical and experimental discipline; and felt its vital energy, and had its truth sealed on his

heart, with that kind of evidence, as would doubtless have stood the fire upon the severest trial.

“After this, I scarce need add that he was a divine of the old stamp, and could well defend his system against all gainsayers. In these things he was a scribe well instructed, and with great sagacity and penetration could discern the spirit of error in its most distant approaches. He knew its connections and tendencies, (ever aiming at God’s dishonour or man’s ruin,) and, therefore, as a faithful watchman, always gave the speediest warning of the danger.

“He had those gifts which rendered him a very popular preacher. With a strong, commanding voice, his pronunciation was clear, distinct and deliberate; his speech and gesture decent and natural, without any affectation; his language elegant and pure, but with studied plainness, never below the dignity of the pulpit, nor above the capacity of the meanest of his auditory. The strength of his memory and the flow of his elocution enabled him to preach without notes, but seldom or never extempore. He furnished the lamps of the sanctuary with beaten oil, and the matter and method of his sermons were well studied.

“In treating Divine subjects, he manifested an habitual reverence for the majesty of Heaven, a deep sense of the worth of souls, an intimate knowledge of the human heart and its various workings in its twofold state of nature and grace. He dealt faithfully with his hearers, declaring to them the whole counsel of God, shewing them their danger and remedy. And none will perish from under his ministry, but their blood must lie upon their own heads. He always spake from a deep sense of the truths he delivered, and declared those things which he had seen, and which he had heard, and his hands had handled of the word of life; and delivered nothing to his auditory but with a solemnity that discovered its importance.

“His mind had a poetic turn. His style was copious and florid. He sometimes soared, when his subject would admit of it, with an elevated wing, and his imagination enabled him to paint his scene, whatever it was, in very strong and lively colours. Few men could describe the hideous deformity of sin, the misery of men’s apostacy from God, the wonders of redeeming love, the glory and riches of Divine grace, in stronger lines, and more affecting strains, than he.

“In the conduct of life, he was remarkably gentle towards all men, vastly prudent and cautious, and always behaved with the meekness of wisdom, and filled up every relation in life with its proper duty, and was a living example of the truth of that religion which he taught to others. He preached not himself, but Christ Jesus his Lord. In this view, his eye was single, and he regarded no other object. He knew in whose place he stood, and feared no man. He dared to flash the terrors of the law in the face of the stoutest transgressor, with the same freedom as he displayed the amiable beauties and glories of the Gospel for the comfort and refreshment of the penitent believer.

“As he highly honoured his Divine Master, he was highly favoured by Him, of which, take one instance.

“In a former illness, from which it was thought he could not recover, which happened some months before he died, he was greatly distressed by a deep concern for his widow and his great family on the event of his death. But God was pleased, in a time of great extremity, to grant him a glorious and astonishing view of his power, wisdom and goodness, and the riches of his grace, with a particular appropriation to himself and his, such as dispelled every fear, and at that time rendered him impatient to live; but, at length, on his recovery, which commenced immediately on the removal of this distress, his mind settled into a Divine calm. He perceived himself equally willing to live or die, as God pleased. In which temper he continued to his last moment, when placidly he resigned his soul and all his mortal interests, into the hands of his Saviour and his God. Such intercourse sometimes passes between the Father of Spirits and the human spirit, and such honour have they that fear God.”