

THE



CHAPLAINS AND CLERGY

OF

THE REVOLUTION.

BY

J. T. HEADLEY,

AUTHOR OF "WASHINGTON AND HIS GENERALS," "NAPOLEON AND HIS
MARSHALS," ETC., ETC.

NEW YORK:

CHARLES SCRIBNER, 124 GRAND STREET.

1864.

Entered, according to Act of Congress, in the year 1861. by

G. & F. BILL,

In the Clerk's Office of the District Court of the United States for the
District of Massachusetts.

ELECTROTYPED BY
SMITH & McDOUGAL,
82 & 84 Beekman St.

CHAPTER XXI.

JAMES CALDWELL.

HIS BIRTH AND ANCESTRY.—PERSONAL APPEARANCE.—POWER OF HIS VOICE.—HIS CHARACTER.—HIS CONGREGATION AT ELIZABETHTOWN.—MADE CHAPLAIN.—HIS TOAST ON THE RECEPTION OF THE DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE.—HIS ACTIVITY.—REWARDS OFFERED FOR HIS CAPTURE.—REMOVES TO CONNECTICUT FARMS.—GOES ARMED.—HIS SERVICES.—LETTER TO LEE.—ASSISTANT COMMISSARY GENERAL.—LAST INTERVIEW WITH HIS WIFE.—HER MURDER.—FIGHT AT SPRINGFIELD.—“GIVE EM WATTS.”—MURDER OF CALDWELL.—HIS FUNERAL.—HIS CHILDREN.—MONUMENT TO HIM.

No man is more deserving of a prominent place in the history of the Revolution than Rev. James Caldwell. He was born in a settlement of Charlotte county, Virginia, called “Cub Creek,” and was the youngest of seven children. He graduated at Princeton College in 1759, was licensed to preach in 1760, and the next year receiving ordination was settled over the parish of Elizabethtown, New Jersey. His ancestors were Huegenots, who were driven from France to England by religious persecution, from thence to Scotland, and at last to Ireland, from which his father emigrated to this country. He thus inherited a spirit of independence and of resistance to tyranny which made him from the outset of our troubles enlist heart and soul in the cause of American independence. Though of middle height, he was powerfully made and capable of great endurance. His countenance in repose had a tranquil and somewhat pensive expression, but when

roused with heroic daring there was stamped on every lineament the most dauntless, unconquerable resolution. His voice exhibited the same striking contrasts. On ordinary occasions it was low, sweet and musical, captivating the hearer by its winning tones ; but when he stood in front of a regiment, haranguing the soldiers, it rose clear and distinct over the roll of the drum and piercing notes of the fife. Of refined feelings, warm and generous sympathies, and possessing true genius, he won all hearts, and fastened himself so deeply in the affections of his people that to this day his memory is tenderly cherished among the inhabitants of Elizabethtown.

In the exciting scenes that immediately preceded the Revolution he bore a prominent and leading part. His congregation upheld him almost to a man, and when we remember that such patriots as Elias Boudinot, William Livingston, Francis Barber, the Daytons and Ogdens composed it, we can not wonder that both pastor and people were looked upon as head rebels of the province, and became peculiarly obnoxious to the loyalists. In intelligence, valor and patriotism, they had no superiors, and formed a band of noble men, of which New Jersey is justly proud.

At the first call to arms the State offered its brigade for the common defence, and Mr. Caldwell was elected its chaplain—Col. Dayton, his parishioner, being the commander. Col. Ebenezer Elmer, commanding one of the regiments, gives the following account of the manner the declaration of independence was received by the brigade. The courier bearing the news arrived

at head quarters on the 15th of July, 1776, causing the most intense excitement and enthusiasm. "At twelve o'clock," says the Colonel, "assembly was beat that the men might parade in order to receive a treat, and drink the State's health. When having made a barrel of grog, the declaration was read, and the following toast was given by parson Caldwell:—'Harmony, honor, and all prosperity to the free and independent United States of America: wise legislators, brave and victorious armies, both by sea and land, to the United States of America.' When three hearty cheers were given, and the grog flew round a-main." Mr. Caldwell's activity and energy would not allow him to confine himself to the duties of chaplain. The timid were to be encouraged, the hesitating brought over to the side of liberty, and the tories met and baffled at every point. Hence, he would be on the Sabbath with his parish, the next day in the army, and then traversing the country to collect important information, or set on foot measures to advance the common cause. His immense popularity gave him an influence that filled the tories with rage, and made his name common as a household word among the British troops. He at length became such an object of hate and dread that large rewards were offered for his capture. Consequently, when the enemy obtained possession of New York and Staten Island his position became one of extreme peril, for his residence was as well known to them as the head quarters of the army. He, therefore, took the advice of his friends and removed his family to Connecticut Farms, a small place a few miles

from Elizabethtown. As an additional precaution, he went armed, and it was well known that no two or four men would take him alive. Often when preaching in the "old red store," as it was called, he would walk up to the table, and unbuckling a brace of pistols lay them before him, and then commence the services of the Sabbath. Strange as such a proceeding may seem at the present day, this good man at the time did not deem it to demand a passing explanation. He was engaged in what he firmly believed to be the cause of God, and that cause he did not consider would be advanced by yielding himself unresistingly into the hands of a skulking tory to be dragged to the scaffold. His country needed his services, not his death in this manner, though his life he held cheap enough whenever liberty should call for the sacrifice.

The retreat of Washington through New Jersey, hotly pursued by Cornwallis, coming as it did on the heels of the fall of New York and Forts Washington and Lee, paralyzed the inhabitants with terror. At the very outset they saw their State overrun with hostile troops, and the struggle that had opened so auspiciously at Bunker Hill, seemed about to close in sudden night. Mr. Caldwell, however, did not share in the general despondency produced by this gloomy state of affairs. The darker the prospects became, the higher rose his resolution, and the more complicated and disheartening the condition of the army grew, the more persevering were his efforts, and the more tireless his unsleeping activity. He seemed ubiquitous, for scarcely would he be reported in one place when his

presence was announced in another, and nothing seemed to escape his keen, penetrating scrutiny. His spies were everywhere, and the enemy could not make a movement that eluded his watchful eye. The aid he furnished at this time to the American army in keeping it advised of every step taken by the invading force was of incalculable service.

Washington at length crossed the Delaware and drew up his enfeebled army on its farther shore, where he waited with deep anxiety the advance of Lee from the banks of the Hudson to his assistance. This officer, ambitious of performing some brilliant achievement which should place him in enviable contrast to Washington, lingered on his way, and from one pretext and another deferred obeying the peremptory orders of his commander. Even when he reached Morristown he postponed farther advance in hopes of making an independent movement and cutting in two the extended lines of the British. In order to effect this he constantly wrote to Caldwell to keep him advised of the motions of the enemy. The latter, though he knew Lee's orders were to move forward with all possible despatch to the main army, willingly furnished him all the information in his power. Lee's last letter to him was written on the 12th of December. Caldwell immediately replied to it, telling him that the British army had moved forward, leaving nothing behind but the guards of the several posts, and then added significantly that the American militia had been moved back to Chatam, where they would be in a situation to be of more service than if farther in advance,

“until the expected army approaches for their support.” The stern patriot, while rendering all the aid in his power to this self-conceited and ambitious leader, could not refrain from giving him this delicate but plain and palpable hint as to his duty. The next day this haughty general, who was to perform such wonderful achievements, was captured with his entire guard while stopping at a small tavern at Barkenridge.

After the brilliant victories at Trenton and Princeton, Mr. Caldwell was very little with the main army, but devoted his time and services when not engaged in his parochial duties to the cause of liberty in his own State. Such was his popularity, and so entire was the confidence of the people in his integrity, that when the army became greatly reduced, and both provisions and money were hard to be obtained, he was appointed Assistant Commissary General. He opened his office at Chatam, and the department felt at once a new impulse imparted to it. His ability, energy, popularity and well-known honesty enabled him to be of incalculable service, and provisions began to pour in, those bringing them accepting whatever guarantees he could give, and sometimes taking his simple word as security. But though he could feed the troops, he could not pay them the money which Congress owed them. In their destitute condition the soldiers suffered greatly for the want of this, and were often on the verge of open rebellion. When matters reached such a dangerous crisis he would assemble them, and by his eloquent appeals, not only allay the excitement of anger, but kindle their enthusiasm so that they would promise

to fight on whatever the sufferings and hardships they might be called to undergo.

The unselfish, entire devotion of this gifted man to his country was of the Washington type—far above the reach of all external influence—a devotion in which life itself and all its outward interests were forgotten, or remembered only as an offering ever ready to be made to her welfare.

He gave up his church as a hospital for the sick and wounded soldiers, who, in making tables of the seats, often so covered them with grease and fragments of bread and provision that the congregation on the Sabbath would be compelled to stand during the whole service. When the news of an approaching enemy was received, *its* bell would ring out the note of alarm, for pastor, congregation and church were all consecrated to the same holy cause.

The appointment of any man to the post of Assistant Commissary General at a time when it was almost impossible for the ablest officer to perform its duties satisfactorily was a high compliment, but when it is remembered that Mr. Caldwell was pastor of a church, and preached to his congregation every Sabbath, the selection of him to fill it shows what an exalted estimate was put upon his ability and patriotism. It was not to be expected that a minister and people that occupied so prominent a place in the cause of the Colonies could long escape the vengeance of the British. It was well known that threats of the most malignant kind had been made against him, but they took no positive shape till in January, 1780, when a refugee

fired the church. The villain, in confession of the deed afterwards, said he was sorry that the "black-coated" rebel was not burned in his own pulpit. The inhabitants were aroused by the light of the conflagration, but too late to save the edifice sacred both to freedom and to God, and it was burned to the ground.

The next summer, in June, Knyphausen made his sudden and apparently objectless inroad into New Jersey. On the night of the 24th Mr. Caldwell slept in his own house, but was wakened early in the morning by the news of the approach of the enemy. Mounting his horse in haste he started for headquarters with the information. He had proceeded but a short distance, however, when he began to have serious fears for his wife and family that he had left behind. The former, when she bade him "good-bye," told him that she had no apprehensions for her own safety, for the enemy, she said, would not harm her and her little children. He had often left them in a similar way before and always found them safe on his return, but now he was oppressed with unusual anxiety, and after striving in vain to shake it off turned his horse and galloped back. As he rode up to the door his wife came out to inquire what he wanted. He told her that he wished her and the children to accompany him to camp, for he felt very uneasy about leaving them behind. But she knowing they would encumber his movements, smiled at his fears, saying there was no danger at all, and declined entirely to leave the house. In the mean time she went in and brought from the

breakfast table a warm cup of coffee. While he sat on his horse drinking it the enemy came in sight. Handing back the cup, and flinging her a hasty farewell, and commending her to the care and mercy of the God in whom they both trusted, he struck his spurs into his horse and dashed away.

He had not been gone long before she had cause to regret that she had not yielded to his entreaties, for columns of smoke rising in the distance—the screams of terrified women and children running through the streets, told her that the enemy was on a raid, and murder and devastation were marking their passage. She saw at once that she was surrounded with deadly perils, but calm as became the wife of a hero as well as clergyman, she took her infant and retired into a private room to commit herself and children in prayer to God. Arising from her devotions she sat down upon the bed, and was pondering on her desolate condition when the maid, who had accompanied her with the other children, stepped to the window to look out. As she did so she saw a “red coat” jump over the fence into the yard. Alarmed, she turned quickly and told Mrs. Caldwell. The latter knew at once that evil was intended her, and arose from the bed either to watch the man’s actions or to pass out of the room, when the villain caught a glimpse of her through the window. He knew her at a glance, and having come on purpose to kill her, he raised his musket, and fired at her through the window, when she fell amid her terrified children, pierced by two balls. In the midst of the alarm and confusion that followed the torch was ap-

plied to the house, and soon the little parsonage was wrapped in flames. It was with great difficulty that some of the neighbors whom the maid informed of the murder were enabled to drag the body out of the burning building. But having accomplished this they were compelled to flee, leaving it exposed in the hot sun in the public street, where it lay for hours with no one humane enough to throw a covering over the pale and ghastly face. At length some of her friends obtained permission from the enemy to remove it into the only house left standing near by.

Mr. Caldwell was at the "Short Hills" with the army while this murderous scene was being enacted at his quiet home. That evening passing by chance two soldiers who were talking in whispers, he heard the name of "Mrs. Caldwell" repeated two or three times. Suspecting at once that something was wrong, he asked them what they were talking about—if any thing had happened to Mrs. Caldwell. They at first hesitated to reply, unwilling to break to him the painful intelligence, but he besought them so earnestly to let him know the worst that they finally told him all. The good man staggered like a smitten ox under the sudden blow, and turned pale as death. Rallying, however, he murmured a broken prayer and turned away to weep alone. That was a painful night to the noble patriot, for not only did he mourn deeply over the tragical end of his wife, whom he loved tenderly, but he was filled with apprehension respecting his orphaned children, one of whom was an infant—now in possession of the enemy. In the morning he pro-

cured a flag of truce and went over to “Connecticut Farms.” The quiet little village was a heap of smoking ruins, with only here and there a solitary building standing as monuments to mark the desolation. In one of these lay the lifeless body of his wife, and in an adjoining apartment were grouped his weeping children.

The enemy, after burning Connecticut Farms, kept on towards Springfield, with the intention of committing the same barbarous cruelties there. Mr. Caldwell, after seeing his wife buried, and his children placed in the care of one of his parishioners, hastened forward to join the army. At Springfield a sharp engagement took place between the enemy and the American troops, and though the former were compelled to beat a hasty retreat, it was not till they had burned the village to the ground. Mr. Caldwell was in the hottest of the fight, and seeing the fire of one of the companies slackening for want of wadding, he galloped to the Presbyterian meeting house near by, and rushing in, ran from pew to pew, filling his arms with hymn books. Hastening back with these into the battle, he scattered them about in every direction, saying as he pitched one here and another there, “*Now put Watts into them, boys.*” With a laugh and a cheer they pulled out the leaves, and ramming home the charges did give the British Watts with a will.

The next year this patriotic, gifted man met the tragical fate of his wife, and sealed his devotion to his country with his blood.

New Jersey remained comparatively tranquil after

the raid of Knyphausen, and flags of truce were constantly passing to and fro to New York, and only soldiers enough were left in the State to act as sentinels at main points. At this time there lived in New York a family by the name of Murray, who had relatives residing in Elizabethtown, and who were much beloved by the people in the vicinity for their kindness to Jersey prisoners confined in the city. One of the family, Miss Murray, wishing to visit Elizabethtown, came to Elizabethtown Point on the 24th of November, under a flag of truce. Mr. Caldwell went down in a carriage to meet her, and accompany her to the town. The details of the events that followed, I will let Dr. Murray tell in his own language. "A sentry was kept up at that time at the Fort. Tying his horse outside the sentinel, Mr. Caldwell, proceeded to the wharf, and taking with him Miss Murray, placed her in his carriage, and then returned to the boat for a small bundle that belonged to her. Thus, he passed three times the man who was keeping guard. With a small package he was returning a second time to his carriage, when the sentinel ordered him to stop, thinking, probably, that there was something contraband in the bundle. He replied that the bundle belonged to the young lady in his carriage. The sentinel said that it must be examined. Mr. Caldwell turned quickly about to carry it back to the boat, that it might be opened there, when the fatal ball struck him. The captain of the guard hearing the report of a gun looked around, and saw Mr. Caldwell staggering before him. He ran and caught him in his arms and laid him on the ground,

and without speaking a word he almost instantly expired—the ball having passed through his heart.

The man who shot him was James Morgan, belonging to the Jersey militia—an Irishman by birth, and a man of the most debased and profligate character. He was always drunk when he could be ; and liquor turned him into a savage. His family resided near a well in Elizabethtown, into which a child of his fell one day and was drowned. When he returned he found his child dead, and taking it by the arms he beat the broken-hearted mother with the dead body of her own child until her cries brought some of the neighbors to her rescue."

Whether Morgan was on duty as a sentinel when he shot Caldwell is at least questionable. It is said that on his trial it was proved that he had just been relieved. Different motives are assigned for the murder. Some say that Morgan was angry because he had not received his regular wages, and inasmuch as Caldwell was commissary, supposed "he was responsible for the neglect ;" others, again, say that he was bribed by the British, or tories. Whatever the motives might have been that influenced him, he was, after a fair trial, convicted of murder, and hung the next January. The body of Mr. Caldwell was placed on some straw in the bottom of a wagon, and taken up to town, and the next Tuesday buried. Dr. Murray thus describes the funeral : "The funeral was one of the most solemn this town has ever witnessed. The concourse assembled on the occasion was immense. The Rev. Dr. McWhorter, of Newark, preached the funeral sermon

from Ecclesiastes, viii. 8, and after the service was ended, the corpse was placed on a large stone before the door of the house of Mrs. Noel, where all could take a view of the remains of their beloved pastor. When this affecting ceremony was over, and before the coffin was closed, Dr. Boudinot came forward, leading nine orphan children, and placing them around their father's bier, made an address of surpassing pathos to the multitude in their behalf. It was an hour of deep and powerful emotion, and the procession slowly moved to the grave, weeping as they went. And as they lifted their streaming eyes to Heaven, they besought the blessing of God upon the orphan group, and upon their own efforts to resist and vanquish their oppressors." The promise of the orphan's God was made good to them, for friends came forward who provided for them so that they all grew up respectable and useful, and some became distinguished members of society. Lafayette took the third child, John E., and he was educated in France, under the direction of the Marchioness. Another became County Judge, while another still was for many years clerk of the Supreme Court of the United States. In honor of his efforts in the cause of African colonization, a town in Liberia is called "Caldwell" at this day.

Mr Caldwell was as earnest in the pulpit as he was out of it. He seldom preached without weeping himself, and often would melt his audience to tears.

"He was a man of unwearied activity, and of wonderful powers, both of body and mental endurance. Feelings of the most glowing piety, and the most fer-

vent patriotism occupied his bosom, at the same time without at all interfering with each other. He was one day preaching to the battalion—the next providing ways and means for their support, and the next marching with them to battle ; if defeated, assisting to conduct their retreat ; if victorious, offering their united thanksgivings to God, and the next carrying the consolations of the gospel to some afflicted or dying parishioner.”

The cause of freedom, and especially the State of New Jersey, owe him a large debt, and it is gratifying to know that his noble deeds have not been left to tradition alone for preservation, but that a monument has been erected to him in the burying ground of the First Presbyterian church, which has been built upon the site of the old one that was burned in 1780. On the east side of the monument is inscribed :—“ This monument is erected to the memory of the Rev. James Caldwell, the pious and fervent christian, the zealous and faithful minister, the eloquent preacher, and a prominent leader among the worthies who secured the independence of his country. His name will be cherished in the Church and in the State so long as virtue is esteemed, and patriotism honored.” On the south side :—“ James Caldwell, born in Charlotte Co., Virginia, April 17th, 1734 ; graduated at Princeton College, 1759 ; ordained pastor of the First Presbyterian Church, of Elizabethtown, 1762. After serving as chaplain in the army of the revolution, and acting as commissary to the troops in New Jersey, he was killed by a shot from a sentinel at Elizabethtown Point,

November 24th, 1781." On the other two sides are inscriptions to his wife. One of them is, "Hannah, wife of the Rev. James Caldwell, and daughter of Jonathan Ogden, of Newark, was killed at Connecticut Farms by a shot from a British soldier, June 25th,* 1780, cruelly sacrificed by the enemies of her husband, and of her country."

"The memory of the just is blessed."

* The date is incorrect.