

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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District of New York.

"In social life also, he was worthy of imitation. As a husband, he was affectionate and kind; as a father, tender and indulgent. In him, condescension and authority were duly tempered. There was *that* in him that could engage love and command reverence at the same time. Who that was acquainted with him, would not be ready to say,—'happy was the family of which he was the head, and happy the congregation that enjoyed his ministry—happy the judicature of which he was a member, and happy the person who was favoured with his friendship!' He was a public blessing to the Church, an honour to his people, an ornament to his profession, who 'magnified his office.' He spoke as he believed; he practised as he preached; he lived holy, and died joyfully.

"For a long course of years, he had a habitual, increasing assurance of his interest in the favour of God, and that a blessed and glorious eternity would one day open upon him; which were his own emphatical words on his dying bed. This his assurance, was solid and scriptural, arising from the many and clear experiences he had of gracious communications to his soul. He was made sensible in his early years of his guilty state by nature as well as practice; felt his inability to deliver himself; saw plainly that he lay at mercy, and that it was entirely at God's pleasure to save or reject him. This view of the case created in him a restless concern, until the way of life through Jesus Christ was graciously discovered to him. Thus he saw that God could save him in consistency with all the honours of governing justice; for that the obedience and sufferings of Christ in the room of sinners have made a sufficient atonement for sin. He saw that Christ was a Saviour every way complete and suitable for him. His soul approved the Divine and glorious plan; and freely disclaiming all dependance on his own righteousness, wisdom and strength, most gladly accepted the offer of the Gospel, that Christ should be his 'wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption.' Strict holiness was his choice, and it was the delightful business of his life to do always those things which pleased his Heavenly Father. And on his dying bed, he had the full approbation and testimony of his conscience, as to the general bent and tenor of his life. These particulars are the heads of what he himself told me in his last sickness, and are delivered in the same order, as near as I can possibly recollect."

DAVID COWELL.*

1735—1761.

DAVID COWELL was born in Wrentham, Mass., in the year 1704. He was graduated at Harvard College in 1732. Having studied Theology, and received license to preach, he went to Trenton, N. J., in the autumn of 1735, where he was employed to supply a vacant pulpit. On the 7th of April, 1736, he received a call to settle there, which he accepted; and the Presbytery of Philadelphia ordained and installed him on the 3d of November following. The sermon on the occasion was preached by the Rev. Jedediah Andrews of Philadelphia.

In the division of the Presbyterian Church in 1741, Mr. Cowell maintained a somewhat neutral position. He remained with the Old Side, and had no sympathy with what he regarded the extreme measures of the New Brunswick party; but he still remained in intimate relations with President Burr, and others belonging to the same side. The Commissions of the two Synods met at Trenton, in 1749, to consult in regard to a re-union, and Mr. Cowell was chosen Moderator; but nothing more decisive was done at the meeting, than to agree that each Synod should more fully prepare proposals of reconciliation, and that there should be, in the meantime, a mutual endeavour to cultivate a friendly and fraternal spirit.

* Hodge's Hist. Presb. Ch.—Webster's MSS.—Rev. Dr. Pierce's MSS.—MS. from Rev. Dr. John Hall.

Mr. Cowell was a devoted friend to New Jersey College, and was one of its Trustees from its foundation till his death. He was a great admirer of Davies, and had much to do in securing his election to the Presidency of the College. To induce his acceptance of the place, he wrote thus to him:—

“The College ought to be esteemed of as much importance to the interests of religion and liberty as any other institution of the kind in America. God, at first, in a most remarkable manner, owned and blessed it. It was the Lord’s doing. He erected it; for our beginning was nothing. He carried it on till it was marvellous in our eyes. But it hath been under terrible frowns of Divine Providence; first in the loss of Mr. Burr,—the life and soul of it; and then of Mr. Edwards, from whom we had such raised expectations. May the Father of mercies look with pity and compassion on the work of his own hands! I am sensible that your leaving Virginia is attended with great difficulties; but I cannot think your affairs of equal importance with the College.”

On the union of the two Synods, Mr. Cowell joined the New Brunswick Presbytery, and continued in relation with it till his death. He died, in his fifty-seventh year, on the 1st of December, 1760,—having never been married. President Davies preached his Funeral Sermon, from Hebrews iv. 11,—from which the following is an extract:—

“During the short time I have been a resident of this Province, he [Mr. Cowell] has been my very intimate friend; and I have conversed with him in his most unreversed hours, when conversation was the image of his soul. I had only a general acquaintance with him for ten years before.

“The characteristics of his youth were a serious, virtuous, religious turn of mind, free from the vices and vanities of that thoughtless age, and a remarkable thirst for knowledge; and I am witness how lively a taste for books and knowledge he cherished to the last. He appeared to me to have a mind steadily and habitually bent towards God and holiness. If his religion was not so warm and passionate as that of some, it was perhaps proportionally more even, uniform and rational. His religion was not a transient passion, but appeared to be a settled temper. Humility and modesty, those gentle virtues, seemed to shine in him with a very amiable lustre. He often imposed a voluntary silence upon himself, when he would have made an agreeable figure in conversation. He was fond of giving way to his brethren with whom he might justly have claimed an equality, or to encourage modest worth in his inferiors. He was not impudently liberal of unasked advice, though very judicious, impartial, and communicative, when consulted. He had an easy, graceful negligence in his carriage,—a noble indifference about setting himself off; he seemed not to know his own accomplishments, though they were so conspicuous that many a man has made a brilliant appearance with a small share of them. He had a remarkable command of his passions; he appeared calm and unruffled amid the storms of the world,—peaceful and serene amid the commotions and uproar of human passions. Remarkably cautious and deliberate, slow to determine, and especially to censure, he was well guarded against extremes. In matters of debate, and especially in religious controversy, he was rather a moderator and compromiser than a party. Though he could not be neuter, but judged for himself to direct his own conduct, he could exercise candour and forbearance without constraint or reluctance; when he happened to differ in opinion from any of his brethren, even themselves could not but acknowledge and admire his moderation.

“His accomplishments, as a man of sense and learning, were very considerable. His judgment was cool, deliberate and penetrating; his sentiments were well digested, and his taste excellent. He had read not a few of the best modern authors, and was no stranger to ancient literature. He could think as well as read; and the knowledge he collected from books was well digested, and became his own. He had carefully studied the Sacred Scriptures, and had a rational theory of the Christian system.

“He had an easy, natural vein of wit, which rendered his conversation extremely agreeable; he sometimes used it with great dexterity to expose the rake, the fop, the infidel, and other fools of the human species; it was sacred to the service of virtue, or innocently volatile and lively, to heighten the pleasures of conversation.

“He was a lover of mankind, and delighted in every office of benevolence. Benevolence appeared to be his predominant virtue, and gave a most amiable cast to his whole temper and conduct.

“That he might be able to support himself without oppressing a small congregation, he gave some part of his time to the study and practice of physic, in which he made no inconsiderable figure. A friend of the poor, he spared neither time nor expense to relieve them.

"I never had the happiness to hear him in the sacred desk. In prayer, I am sure he appeared humble, solemn, rational and importunate, as a creature,—a sinner in the presence of God.

"In the charter of the College of New Jersey, he was nominated one of the Trustees; and but few, invested with the same trust, discharged it with so much zeal, diligence, and alacrity. His heart was set upon its prosperity; he exerted himself in this service, nor did he forget it in his last moments.

"The Church has lost a judicious minister, and, as we hope, a sincere Christian; the world has lost an inoffensive, useful member of society; this town an agreeable, peaceable, benevolent inhabitant; the College of New Jersey a father; and I have lost a friend."

AARON BURR.*

1736—1757.

AARON BURR was a descendant of the Rev. Jonathan Burr, who migrated to New England in 1639, and was, for some time, pastor of the church in Dorchester, Mass. He was the youngest son of Daniel Burr, of Upper Meadows, Fairfield, Conn., where he was born on the 4th of January, 1715–16. His early developments indicated a mind of uncommon power and versatility. He was graduated at Yale College in 1735, having been, during his whole course, distinguished for his proficiency, in both the languages and the sciences. He remained in College, a resident graduate on the Berkeley foundation, for one year; and, during this period, his mind underwent a revolution in respect to religion, of which the following account was found, after his decease, among his private papers:—

"This year (1736) God saw fit to open my eyes, and show me what a miserable creature I was. Till then I had spent my life in a dream; and as to the great design of my being, had lived in vain. Though before I had been under frequent convictions, and was drove to a form of religion, yet I knew nothing as I ought to know. But then I was brought to the footstool of sovereign grace; saw myself polluted by nature and practice; had affecting views of the Divine wrath I deserved; was made to despair of help in myself, and almost concluded that my day of grace was past. These convictions held for some months; greater at some seasons than at others; but I never revealed them to any, which I have much lamented since. It pleased God, at length, to reveal his Son to me in the Gospel, an all-sufficient and willing Saviour, and I hope inclined me to receive Him on the terms of the Gospel. I received some consolation, and found a great change in myself. Before this, I was strongly attached to the Arminian scheme, but then was made to see those things in a different light, and seemingly felt the truth of the Calvinian doctrines."

This change in his religious views and feelings was quickly succeeded by a determination to devote his life to the Christian ministry. And, having gone through the requisite preparation, he received license to preach in September, 1736. He preached his first sermon at Greenfield, Mass., and then went to New Jersey and laboured a short time at Hanover. His uncommon powers in the pulpit attracted no small attention, and the church at Newark, then in a somewhat depressed state, invited him to officiate as a stated supply for one year, commencing with January, 1736–37. At the expiration of that term,—January 25, 1737–38,—he was ordained and installed pastor of the church,—Mr. Pierson preaching the Sermon, and Jonathan Dickinson giving the Charge.

* Smith's Sermon occasioned by his death.—Livingston's Eulogy.—Miller's Ret., II.—App. to Green's Disc.—App. to Dwight's Life of Edwards.—Memoir of Aaron Burr.—Stearns' Hist. First Church in Newark.