

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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SAMUEL DAVIES.*

1746—1761.

SAMUEL DAVIES was born near Summit Ridge, Newcastle County, De., November 3, 1723. He was, on both sides, of Welsh extraction. His father was a farmer, in humble circumstances, and of moderate intellectual powers and attainments, but of unexceptionable Christian character. His mother was distinguished for both talents and piety; and, from his birth, she sacredly devoted him to the service of the Lord in the Christian ministry. The father died in 1759, aged seventy-nine years. The mother survived her son several years, and passed the latter part of her life in the family of the Rev. Dr. Rodgers of New York.

The rudiments of his education he received from his mother, there being no school in the neighbourhood in which the family lived; but when he was about ten years old, he had an opportunity of attending a school some distance from home, where, for two years, he studied diligently, and improved rapidly. His mother had given the strictest attention to his religious education, and, by the blessing of God upon her unwearied efforts, in connection with her earnest prayers, he became, at the age of twelve, deeply and permanently impressed with the great truths of religion; though he did not make a public profession of his faith till after he had entered his fifteenth year.

His classical course was commenced under the tuition of a respectable Welsh Baptist minister,—the Rev. Abel Morgan; but he was transferred to Mr. Blair's famous school at Fagg's Manor, soon after its establishment. Here, under excellent advantages, he devoted himself to the study of the classics and the sciences, as well as Theology; and, in consequence of excessive application, his health, before the close of his course, was not a little impaired. He was licensed to preach by the Newcastle Presbytery, on the 30th of July, 1746. On the 23d of October following, he was married to Sarah Kirkpatrick, supposed to have been a daughter of John Kirkpatrick, of Nottingham.

On the 19th of February, 1747, he was ordained as an evangelist, with a view to a mission among some of the destitute congregations in Virginia, especially in Hanover County. This was, on several accounts, an unpromising and difficult field, especially in consideration of the fact that the Episcopal Church was then the Established Church of Virginia, and the Dissenters were, for the most part, extremely obnoxious to the civil authorities; but Mr. Davies is said to have undertaken the mission, partly from a feeling of gratitude towards certain persons in that region, who, through one of his friends, had contributed to meet the expenses of his education. On his arrival at Williamsburg, in April, he petitioned the General Court for a license to officiate at four different places of worship in and about Hanover. The petition was granted, chiefly through the influence of the Governor; though, at that time, there were pending several civil suits against Dissenting ministers, for holding religious worship in a manner not

* Finley's Fun. Serm.—Gibbon's do.—Assemb. Miss. Mag. I.—Panop. II.—Lit. and Evang. Mag.—Green's Hist. of N. J. Coll.—Foote's Sketches of Va. I.

recognised by the law of the Province. He immediately entered upon his labours, and was received with great enthusiasm, and listened to by multitudes with profound attention. The people were quickly resolved on securing his services permanently, and, after three or four months, they sent a call for him to the Presbytery. He returned from Virginia to Delaware about the close of summer; and, on the 15th of September, was suddenly bereaved of his wife, under circumstances peculiarly afflictive. His own health was now greatly reduced, and there was every thing to indicate that he was the subject of a confirmed consumption. He, however, continued his labours, preaching during the day, even when he was so ill at night as to need persons to sit up with him.

In the spring of 1748, there was some slight improvement in his condition, insomuch that his friends began to regard his recovery as at least possible. Many requests were now put in for his services; and that from Hanover was renewed with increased importunity. This he was, on every account, predisposed to accept; and, accordingly, he did accept it, though without any expectation that his health would allow him long to retain the charge. On this second visit to Virginia, he was accompanied by his intimate friend, Mr. John Rodgers, afterwards the Rev. Dr. Rodgers of New York, who, however, failed in his application for a license to preach in the Province.

On the 4th of October, 1748, he formed a second matrimonial connection with Jean, daughter of John Holt of Hanover, who became the mother of six children, and survived him many years.

About the same time, his license to preach was extended to three additional meeting-houses, so that his labours were now divided between seven places of worship, in five different counties, and some of them forty miles distant from each other; but his health was by this time restored, so that he was able to meet his manifold engagements. His residence was in Hanover, about twelve miles from Richmond. By his glowing zeal, combined with exemplary prudence, and an eloquence more impressive and effective than had then perhaps ever graced the American pulpit, he made his way among all classes of people, and was alike acceptable to all, from the most polished gentleman to the most ignorant African slave. A manifest blessing from on high attended his labours; and within about three years from the time of his settlement, no less than three hundred had been gathered to the communion of the church.

Though Mr. Davies succeeded, with little difficulty, in obtaining a license from the civil authorities to occupy so wide a field by his professional labours, he was subsequently engaged in controversy with Peyton Randolph, the King's Attorney General, on the question whether the Act of Toleration, which had been passed in England expressly for the relief of Protestant Dissenters, extended also to Virginia; he vigorously maintaining the affirmative, and the Attorney General *as* vigorously the negative. On one occasion, he appeared personally before the General Court, and replied to the Attorney General in a strain of eloquence, which is said to have won the admiration of the most earnest of his opponents. He maintained his position with the utmost firmness; and when, on his visit to England, he had an opportunity to bring the matter before the King in Council, he received a declaration, under authority, that the Act of Toleration did extend to the Colony of Virginia.

On the 4th of October, 1753, a request was presented to the Synod of New York, then in session in Philadelphia, by the Trustees of the College of New Jersey, that they would appoint two of their members, Messrs. Gilbert Tennent and Samuel Davies, to make a voyage to Europe to solicit benefactions in aid of the College. The appointment having been made and accepted, and every thing having been arranged for their departure, they embarked in a vessel for London on the 17th of November, where they arrived on the 25th of December. They visited Scotland together, but parted at Edinburgh, Mr. Tennent to visit Glasgow and Ireland, and Mr. Davies the principal towns in England. They subsequently met in London, in October, 1754; and the next month embarked for America,—Mr. Tennent immediately for Philadelphia, and Mr. Davies for York, Va. The latter had a rough and protracted passage, and did not reach Virginia till the 13th of February, 1755. He was received with great favour in both England and Scotland, and preached to not only universal acceptance, but universal admiration. The object of the united mission was also happily accomplished, in much larger collections being made for the College, than even the most sanguine friends of the enterprise had ventured to hope for.

Mr. Davies, on his return, immediately resumed his pastoral labours, though he found himself in the midst of a state of things that forbade him to confine his labours to his own congregation. The French and Indian war was at this time occasioning the greatest agitation throughout that part of the country; and even the idea of abandoning a part of the Colony of Virginia to the enemy had been suggested. On the 20th of July, 1755, occurred General Braddock's memorable defeat, and the remnant of his army was saved only by the skill and courage of Colonel Washington, then but twenty-three years of age. Ten days after this, Mr. Davies preached a Sermon "On the defeat of General Braddock going to Fort Du Quesne;" in which he called upon his hearers, in the most impassioned strain, to show "themselves Men, Britons and Christians, and to make a noble stand for the blessings they enjoyed." It was apprehended that the negroes might join the Indians and French; and Mr. Davies, who had perhaps more influence with them than any other person, exerted himself to the utmost to prevent such a movement. In August of the same year, he delivered a Sermon in Hanover to a company of Independent Volunteers, which was afterwards published, and in a note to which he alludes prophetically to Washington—"That heroic youth," says he, "Colonel Washington, whom I cannot but hope Providence has hitherto preserved in so signal a manner, for some important service to his country." On another occasion, he preached a Sermon to the Militia of Hanover County, with a view to raise a company for Captain Samuel Meredith; and such was the enthusiasm produced by the Discourse that, within a few minutes after it was concluded, the company was made up, and the preacher was well nigh overwhelmed with demonstrations of respect and admiration.

But, notwithstanding these patriotic efforts, which the circumstances of the times evidently demanded, Mr. Davies suffered nothing to diminish his exertions, or damp his zeal, in his appropriate work as a Christian minister. He preached the Gospel continually; in season and out of season; among the negroes as well as the white population; and his labours were attended with marked success. The Presbytery of Hanover,—the first Presbytery in Virginia, was founded shortly after his return from Europe,

and chiefly through his instrumentality. The Act of the Synod of New York for this purpose bears date September 3, 1755; and Mr. Davies was appointed to open the Presbytery, which was directed to meet at Hanover on the 3d of December of that year.

Mr. Davies may be considered as having been the soul of the Dissenting interest in Virginia. The Presbytery of Hanover originally comprehended the whole of Virginia, and the greater part, if not the whole, of North Carolina; and throughout this extensive region were scattered settlements that were not in sympathy with the Established Church. Over this wide tract of country Mr. Davies' influence was diffused. So great was his popularity that his labours were called for abroad, much too often to satisfy his own people; and they even warmly remonstrated with the Presbytery for directing him to supply so many vacancies.

On the 16th of August, 1758, Mr. Davies was chosen to succeed Jonathan Edwards, as President of the College of New Jersey; but he declined the appointment. He was, however, on the 9th of May, 1759, elected a second time; and, though he still felt strong objections to leaving that extensive and important field, yet, as this was a second appointment, and the Synod had meanwhile given it as their judgment that he ought to accept it, and as he had long felt the deepest interest in the welfare of the College, he was constrained to think that the indications of Providence were in favour of a removal. He, therefore, signified his acceptance of the appointment, resigned his charge on the 13th of May, 1759, removed to Princeton shortly after, entered upon the duties of his office on the 26th of July, and was formally inducted into the Presidential chair on the 26th of September.

As Mr. Davies brought with him to the Collégé the highest reputation for wisdom, piety, and eloquence, so he fully sustained it while his connection with the College continued. He had now the best opportunity for the exercise of his varied gifts; and he used them in such a way as to give new efficiency and lustre to the institution. But, while every thing seemed to promise a protracted career of usefulness, he was suddenly called away to exercise his powers on a nobler field. His habit being somewhat plethoric, he had been accustomed in Virginia to the exercise of riding, as a means of preserving his health. His duties at Princeton led him into a sedentary life, and his application to study was intense and unremitted. Towards the close of January, 1761, he was bled for a severe cold, and the next day transcribed for the press his Sermon on the death of George the Second. The day following, he preached twice in the College chapel. His arm became inflamed, and a violent fever ensued, to which he fell a victim in ten days. He died on the 4th of February, 1761, at the age of thirty-six, and after having held the office of President of the College a little more than eighteen months. His disease, in its progress, was accompanied by delirium; but, in his lucid intervals, and even amidst the wanderings of his mind, it was manifest that the tendencies of his spirit were towards immortality. A Sermon on the occasion of his death was preached in London on the 29th of March by the Rev. Dr. Thomas Gibbons, and another at Princeton on the 28th of May, by the Rev. Dr. Samuel Finley; both of which were published.

The following is a list of President Davies' publications:—A Sermon on man's primitive state, 1748. The state of religion among the Protestant

Dissenters in Virginia, in a Letter to the Rev. Joseph Bellamy, 1751. A Sermon preached before the Presbytery of Newcastle, 1752. A Sermon preached at the installation of the Rev. John Todd,* 1752. Religion and Patriotism, the constituents of a good soldier: A Sermon preached before a company of Volunteers, 1755. Virginia's Danger and Remedy: Two Discourses occasioned by the severe drought, and the defeat of General Braddock, 1756. Letters, showing the state of Religion in Virginia, particularly among the negroes, 1751-1757. A Sermon on the "vessels of mercy and the vessels of wrath," 1757. A Sermon on "Little children invited to Jesus Christ," 1757. The Curse of Cowardice: A Sermon before the Militia of Virginia, 1758. A Valedictory Discourse to the Senior class in the College of New Jersey, 1760. A Sermon on the death of George II., 1761. He was also the author of several important documents of a public nature, and various Hymns and other pieces of poetry, of no small degree of merit.

A collection of his Sermons, including most of those which had been printed during his life time, was published after his death, in three volumes, octavo. They have passed through several editions, both in Great Britain and in America, and are generally regarded as among the most able and eloquent sermons in the English language.

Though it is not to be supposed that there is any person now living, who has any recollections of President Davies, many of the last generation remembered him well, and the testimony which they rendered concerning him is a matter of authentic record. The Rev. Dr. John H. Rice, in the notices of his life and character which appeared in the Literary and Evangelical Magazine, has brought together various well authenticated traditions concerning him, which of themselves are enough to prove that he was one of the most gifted men of his time. The Rev. Dr. John H. Livingston, the Patriarch of the Reformed Dutch Church, informed me that he once heard him preach at Princeton, and that he was without exception the first pulpit orator to whom he had ever listened. His voice, his attitudes, his ges-

* JOHN TODD was graduated at the College of New Jersey in 1749, and was licensed by the Presbytery of New Brunswick in 1750. Shortly after his licensure, he went to Virginia, and preached to great satisfaction in some of the houses that had been licensed for the Rev. Samuel Davies. In 1751, he returned to the North, was ordained by the Presbytery of New Brunswick, and then went back to Virginia, where he was regularly licensed by the General Court "to officiate as an assistant to Samuel Davies, a Dissenting minister." He was installed on the 12th of November, 1752—the Sermon on the occasion was preached by the Rev. Mr. Davies, and was published, the next year, with a Dedication "to the Reverend Clergy of the Established Church of Virginia." After Mr. Davies' removal to Princeton, Mr. Todd was, for many years, the leading man in the Hanover Presbytery, East of the Blue Ridge. He was a staunch Whig during the Revolution, and was always zealous in defence of religious liberty. He took a deep interest in the early immigration to Kentucky, and exerted himself to the utmost to obtain from the Virginia Legislature a charter for a College in that new country; and, after the Transylvania Seminary was established, he was instrumental in furnishing it with a small but valuable library, and a scientific apparatus. He superintended a classical school which was in high repute for many years, but declined, and was finally given up, after he became far advanced in life. He grew prematurely old, in consequence of his excessive labours in the early period of his ministry; and, for several years previous to his death, he was not able to perform all the services required by his own charge. As some reports had arisen adverse to his fidelity, especially in the maintenance of discipline in his church, he attended the meeting of the Presbytery in the Cove Congregation, Albermarle, in July, 1793, with a view to explain and refute the unjust charges. Having accomplished his object, he set out for home on Saturday the 27th, and the same day was found dead in the road. Whether he died from apoplexy, or in consequence of being thrown from his horse, could only be conjectured. Mr. Todd preached in Virginia about forty-two years. A son, bearing his name, was licensed by the Hanover Presbytery, September 13, 1800, preaching his first Sermon where his father preached his last. For some time he occupied the churches left vacant by his father, but in 1809 removed to Kentucky.

ture, every thing pertaining to manner, he said, came up to the most perfect ideal that he was able to form.

The following is an extract from Dr. Finley's Sermon occasioned by his death :

"As to his natural genius, it was strong and masculine. His understanding was clear, his memory retentive, his invention quick, his imagination lively and florid, his thoughts sublime, and his language elegant, strong and expressive. And I cannot but presume that true and candid critics will readily discern a great degree of true poetic fire, style, and imagery, in his poetical compositions; and will grant that he was capable to have shone in that way, had his leisure permitted the due cultivation of his natural talent.

"His appearance in company was manly and graceful, his behaviour genteel, not ceremonious; grave yet pleasant; and solid but sprightly too. In a word, he was an open, conversable and entertaining companion, a polite gentleman, and devout Christian, at once.

"In the sacred desk, zeal for God and love to men animated his addresses, and made them tender, solemn, pungent and persuasive; while, at the same time, they were ingenious, accurate and oratorical. A certain dignity of sentiment and style, a venerable presence, a commanding voice, and emphatical delivery, concurred both to charm his audience, and overawe them into silence and attention.

"Nor was his usefulness confined to the pulpit. His comprehensive mind could take under view the grand interests of his country and of religion at once; and these interests, as well as those of his friends, he was ever ready zealously to serve. It is known what an active instrument he was in stirring up a patriot spirit,—a spirit of courage and resolution in Virginia, where he resided during the late barbarous French and Indian ravages.

"His natural temper was remarkably sweet and dispassionate; and his heart was one of the tenderest towards the distressed. His sympathetic soul could say 'Who is weak, and I am not weak?' Accordingly, his charitable disposition made him liberal to the poor, and that often beyond his ability. He was eminently obliging to all, and very sensible of favours conferred, which he could receive without servility, and manifested his grateful sense of them with proper dignity.

"To his friends he was voluntarily transparent, and fully acted up to the poet's advice :

"Thy friend put in thy bosom; wear his eyes,
Still in thy heart that he may see what's there."

"And perhaps none better understood the ingenuities and delicacies of friendship, or had a higher relish for it, or was truer or more constant in it, than he. He was not easily disgusted; his knowledge of human nature in its present state, his candid heart and enlarged soul, both disposing and enabling him to make allowances for indiscretions, which narrower and more selfish minds could not make. He readily and easily forgave offences against himself, whilst none could be more careful to avoid offending others; which, if he at any time inadvertently did, he was forward and desirous to make the most ample satisfaction.

"He was amongst the first and brightest examples of filial piety; a very indulgent parent and humane master. As a husband, he was kind, tender, cordial and respectful, with a fondness that was manly and genuine. In a word, think what might rationally be expected in the present imperfect state, in a mature man, a Christian in minority, a minister of Jesus, of like passions with others, in a gentleman, companion, and cordial friend, and you conceive of President Davies.

"It would hardly be expected that one so rigid, with respect to his own faith and practice, could be so generous and catholic in his sentiments of those who differed from him in both, as he was. He was strict, not bigoted; conscientious, not squeamishly scrupulous. His clear and extensive knowledge of religion enabled him to discern where the main stress should be laid, and to proportion his zeal to the importance of things,—too generous to be confined to the interests of a party as such. He considered the visible Kingdom of Christ as extended beyond the boundaries of *this* or *that* particular denomination; and never supposed that his declarative glory was wholly dependent on the religious community which he most approved. Hence he gloried more in being a Christian than in being a *Presbyterian*, though he was the latter from principle. His truly catholic address to the Established Clergy of Virginia is a demonstration of the sincere pleasure it would have given him to have heard that 'Christ was preached,' and substantial religion, common Christianity, promoted by those who 'walked not with him,' and whom he judged in other points to be mistaken. His benevolent heart could not be so soured, nor his enlarged soul so contracted, as to value men from circumstantial distinctions, but according to their personal worth.

"He sought truth for its own sake, and would profess his sentiments with the undisguised openness of an honest Christian, and the inoffensive boldness of a manly spirit;

yet, without the least apparent difficulty or hesitation, he would retract an opinion on full conviction of its being a mistake. I have never known one who appeared to lay himself more fully open to the reception of truth, from whatever quarter it came, than he; for he judged the knowledge of truth only to be real learning, and that endeavouring to defend an error was but labouring to be more ignorant. But, until fully convinced, he was becomingly tenacious of his opinion.

“The unavoidable consciousness of native power made him bold and enterprising. Yet the event proved that his boldness arose, not from a partial, groundless, self-conceit, but from true self-knowledge. Upon fair and candid trial, faithful and just to himself, he judged what he could do; and what he could, when called to it, he attempted; and what he attempted he accomplished.

CALEB SMITH.*

1747—1762.

CALEB SMITH, a son of William and Hannah (Sears) Smith, was born at Brookhaven, L. I., December 29, O. S., 1723. The family was one of considerable wealth, and of high respectability.

As he discovered, from early childhood, more than common vigour of mind, and love of learning, his father resolved on giving him a collegiate education; and accordingly placed him at a grammar school, where he made such improvements that, in 1739, in his fifteenth year, he became a member of Yale College. His standing, during his whole college course, was highly respectable, and he graduated, an excellent scholar, in 1743. He remained at College, for some time, as a resident graduate.

During the second year that he was in College, there was a very general attention to religion among the students, in which he also had a share. From that time, his mind seems to have been permanently and habitually directed to his religious interests; though he looked with no little distrust upon his own exercises, on account of their having been less distinct and vivid than he supposed was necessary to give them the stamp of genuineness. To others, however, the evidence of his piety was very satisfactory; and several clergymen, to whom he communicated his religious views and feelings, had no hesitation in expressing the opinion that his conversion was radical, and that he ought to direct his attention to the Christian ministry.

In 1746, about the time he took his second degree, Mr. Burr of Newark, afterwards President of New Jersey College, applied to him to assist him in the instruction of a large Latin school, of which he had the charge; but Mr. Smith's engagements did not allow him to go to Newark till Mr. Burr was otherwise supplied. However, he went some time after to Elizabethtown, where he instructed several young men in the languages, while he pursued the study of Theology under the direction of the Rev. Jonathan Dickinson. At length, by the advice of Mr. Dickinson and some other ministers, he presented himself before the Presbytery of New York as a candidate for the ministry; and, having creditably gone through his several trials, was licensed to preach in April, 1747.

His preaching, from the beginning, was more than commonly acceptable; and, within about a year from his licensure, he received several unanimous

* A Brief Account of his Life.—Stearns' Hist. First Ch., Newark.