

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCHES

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OF THE

FOUNDER, AND PRINCIPAL ALUMNI

OF THE

LOG COLLEGE.

TOGETHER WITH AN ACCOUNT OF THE REVIVALS
OF RELIGION, UNDER THEIR MINISTRY.

COLLECTED AND EDITED

BY

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CHAPTER XVI.

THE REV. SAMUEL FINLEY, D. D.

Birth in Ireland—Immigration to America—Education at the Log College—Becomes a popular Preacher—A successful Itinerant—Settles at Nottingham, Md.—Institutes a Classical School—Eminent as a Teacher—Distinguished Scholars—Elected President of New Jersey College—Continues in this station five years—Seized with a Liver Complaint—Goes to Philadelphia to consult Physicians—Dies there in the triumphs of Faith—Burial—Writings.

DR. FINLEY was born in the county of Armagh, in the province of Ulster, Ireland, in the year 1715, and was one of seven sons, who were all esteemed pious. One of his brothers, the Rev. James Finley, was an esteemed minister in the Presbyterian church; and although his talents were very inferior to those of his brother Samuel, yet he was reckoned to be eminently pious; and continued laboriously to preach the gospel, until an advanced period of life. His latter years he spent in the western part of Pennsylvania, where he died some years before the close of the last century. The writer remembers to have seen him at a meeting of the Virginia synod, in Lexington, in the year 1789. He was one of the pioneers who, amidst many hardships and privations,

carried the gospel to the settlers in the country round about Pittsburgh; and was the companion and coadjutor of such men as Mc Millan, Joseph Smith, Power, Patterson, Dod, Dunlap, &c.

The parents of Dr. Finley were of Scotch descent, and were distinguished for their piety. Finding their son to be of a quick capacity, and fond of learning, they resolved to give him the best education which their circumstances would admit; and after he had obtained the rudiments of an English education, he was sent abroad some distance from home, to prosecute his studies. In this school, he distinguished himself by his assiduity and his proficiency in learning.

When he was in his nineteenth year, he emigrated from his native country, and came to America. He arrived in Philadelphia on the 28th of September, in the year 1734. He appears to have become a subject of divine grace, at a very early age. He has been heard to say, that when only six years old, he heard a sermon which made a deep impression on his mind, and the text of which he never forgot. From that day, he was seized with an ardent desire to become a minister of the gospel. And as he grew up, this desire continued to ripen and increase; so that his purpose was early formed to devote his life to the service of God. Upon his coming to America, he steadily pursued his studies with a view to the holy ministry. And as he arrived in Phila-

delphia, at the very time when Mr. Tennent's school was flourishing at Neshaminy, and as there was then no other institution in the Presbyterian church where young men were trained for the ministry, there is the strongest probability that he was a student at the Log College. This probability is strengthened by the fact, that he put himself under the care of the New Brunswick Presbytery, most of the members of which were educated in this school. His license took place on the 5th of August, in the year 1740. Having received authority to preach, he itinerated extensively; and as his pulpit talents were of a high order of excellence, he was greatly instrumental in carrying on the work of the Lord, which at that time prevailed in almost every part of the land.

His labours in the gospel were greatly blessed in West Jersey;—in Deerfield, Greenwich, and Cape May. He preached also for six months, with great acceptance, in the congregation to which Gilbert Tennent was afterwards called, in Philadelphia. His ordination took place on the 13th of October, in the year 1742. He was probably ordained as an evangelist, and continued to visit the places destitute of the stated means of grace, for several years; and all accounts agree in ascribing much success to his itinerant labours. It was, probably, during this period, that he made a preaching incursion into Connecticut. But so rigid were the laws of this land of

steady habits, that Mr. Finley, for preaching in a congregation in New Haven, was seized as a vagrant, by the civil authority, and carried beyond the limits of the colony. He does not appear to have been permanently settled as a pastor, until June, 1744, when he accepted a call from Nottingham, Maryland. In this place, he remained for seventeen years.*

In this place, he instituted an academy, with the view, chiefly, of preparing young men for the gospel ministry. This school was conducted with admirable wisdom and success, and acquired a higher reputation than any other in the middle colonies; so that students from a distance were attracted to it. Some of the most distinguished men in our country, laid the foundation of their eminence and usefulness, in this academy. At one time, there was a cluster of such young men, who all were afterwards distinguished, and some of them, among the very first men in the country, as the following names well show. Governor Martin, of North Carolina; Dr. Benjamin Rush, of Philadelphia, and his brother, Jacob Rush, an eminent and pious judge; Ebenezer Hazard, Esq. of Philadelphia; Rev. James Waddel, D. D., of Virginia; Rev. Dr. Mc Whorter, of Newark, N. J.; Col. John Bayard, speaker of the House

* In Allen's American Biography, his continuance here is made to be only seven years; but he went there in 1744, and removed in 1761.

of Representatives; Governor Henry, of Maryland, and the Rev. William M. Tennent, of Abington, Pa. It would not be easy, in any country, to find such a constellation in one school, at the same time. That Dr. Finley was an accomplished scholar, and a skilful teacher, was universally admitted. Perhaps this country has not had better classical scholars formed any where, than in this school. The method of instruction in the Latin and Greek languages, was thorough and accurate. The scholars were carefully drilled in the application of the rules of syntax, and in the prosody of these languages. Dr. Finley boarded most of his pupils in his own house, and when they were met at meals, he was in the habit of relaxing from the severity of the pedagogue, and indulging in facetious remarks; saying, that nothing more helped digestion than a hearty laugh. His own temper was remarkably benignant and sweet, and his manners affable and polite.

Dr. Finley had been seriously thought of before Mr. Davies was called to the presidency of Nassau Hall, and when Mr. Davies at first declined the invitation, he strongly recommended Dr. Finley. And it cannot be denied, that both in scholarship, and skill in teaching, the latter was far superior. Dr. Finley too, was a much older man, and had been several years longer in the ministry. But Davies was a man of much more genius, and eloquence, and his acquaintance with English literature was far more

perfect. The premature decease of so many presidents of New Jersey College brought forward a succession of illustrious men, who have ever since reflected honour on that literary institution. Dickinson, Burr, Edwards, Davies, and Finley, all filled the presidential chair, within five or six years. Dr. Finley was elected president, in the year 1761, and immediately entered on the duties of the office; and the trustees were not disappointed in their expectations of his wisdom and efficiency. As he was permitted to remain five years in office, he had the opportunity of carrying into effect, plans for the improvement of the institution, so that its reputation was greatly extended. Dr. Finley held correspondence with some of the learned men of Europe, among whom was Dr. Samuel Chandler, of London; who, as appears by his letters, entertained a high esteem, and indeed, affectionate friendship, for his distant correspondent. It was through the influence of this learned dissenter, that, without the knowledge of Mr. Finley, the degree of doctor of divinity was bestowed upon him by the University of Glasgow; which seems to have been the first instance of any Presbyterian minister, in America, receiving that honorary distinction. But if genius and theological learning could have commanded it, Dickinson, Burr, Edwards and Davies, would all have been distinguished, in the same way. But they need no such appendage to their names; their

works have secured to them, a much higher honour, in the estimation of posterity. And it must be a mortification to many modest men, who bear the title of DOCTOR, that divines to whom they are conscious that they are not fit to be compared, lived and died, without having their names distinguished by any such title. The disease by which Dr. Finley's constitution was attacked, an obstruction of the liver, was supposed to have been contracted by too great assiduity in his studies, and too constant occupation in the public duties of his office. He did not die at home, but in the city of Philadelphia, whither he had gone to consult physicians, respecting his disease. When informed by the physician who attended him, that nothing could be done to remove his malady, and that it must soon prove mortal, he expressed an entire resignation to the divine will, and from that time, was engaged in 'setting his house in order.' He said, "If my work is done, I am ready; I do not desire to live a day longer, than I can work for God." At that time, however, he did not apprehend that his end was so near as it proved to be. His disease made rapid progress; and he was informed by one of his physicians, that he had but few days to live; on which, lifting up his eyes to heaven, he exclaimed, "Then, welcome, Lord Jesus."

On the Sabbath preceding his death, he was informed by Dr. Clarkson, his brother-in-law, that he

perceived a manifest alteration in his appearance, and that evidently his end was near. "Then," said he, "may the Lord bring me near himself! I have been waiting with a Canaan hunger for the promised land. I have often wondered that God suffered me to live. I have more wondered, that he ever called me to be a minister of his word. He has often afforded me much strength, which, though I have often abused, He returned in mercy. Oh! faithful are the promises of God! O that I could see Him as I have seen Him in the sanctuary! Although I have earnestly desired death, as the hireling pants for the evening shade; yet will I wait all the days of my appointed time. I have often struggled with principalities and powers, and have been brought almost to despair—Lord, let it suffice!" Here he sat up; and closing his eyes, he prayed, fervently, that God would show him his glory, before he should depart hence—that He would enable him to endure patiently to the end,—and particularly, that he might be kept from dishonouring the ministry. He then resumed his discourse, and spoke as follows, "I can truly say, I have loved the service of God. I know not in what language to speak of my own unworthiness—I have been undutiful—I have honestly endeavoured to act for God, but with much weakness and corruption." He then lay down, but continued to speak in broken sentences. "A Christian's death," said he, "is the best part of

his experience. The Lord has made provision for the whole way : provision for the soul and for the body. O that I could recollect Sabbath blessings ! The Lord hath given me many souls, as crowns of my rejoicing. Blessed be God, eternal rest is at hand. Eternity is but long enough, to enjoy my God. This, has animated me in my secret studies, I was ashamed to take rest here. O that I could be filled with the fulness of God ! that fulness which fills heaven." Being asked whether he would choose to live or die, he replied, "to die—though I cannot but say, I feel the same strait that Paul did, that he knew not which to choose, *'for me to live is Christ, but to die is gain.'* But should God, by a miracle, prolong my life, I would still continue to serve Him. His service has ever been sweet to me. I have loved it much. I have tried my Master's yoke, and will never shrink my neck from it. "His yoke is easy and his burden light." One said to him, "You are more cheerful and vigorous, Sir." "Yes. I rise or fall as eternal life seems nearer, or farther off." It being remarked, that he always used the expression, "dear Lord," in his prayers, he answered, "O, He is very dear—very precious, indeed."—"How pretty is it for a minister to die on the Sabbath—I expect to spend the remainder of this Sabbath in heaven." One of the company said, you will soon be joined to the blessed society of heaven ; you will forever hold intercourse with

Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and with the spirits of the just made perfect—with old friends and many old-fashioned people.” “Yes, Sir,” he replied with a smile, “but they are a most polite people *now*.” He expressed great gratitude to friends around him, and said, “May the Lord repay you—may He bless you abundantly, not only with temporal, but with spiritual blessings!” Turning to his wife, he said, “I expect, my dear, to see you shortly in glory.”

In this, however, he was disappointed, for Mrs. Finley continued to live, many years after her husband's decease. She was, a long time, completely blind; but under this privation, manifested a pious and contented disposition; being entirely resigned to the will of her heavenly Father. It was an edifying and refreshing thing for any person to pay a visit to her and her companion, Mrs. Hodge, with whom she lived. Their conversation was indeed in heaven. But to return. Dr. Finley, seeing a member of the Second Presbyterian church present, said, “I have often preached and prayed among you, my dear Sir, and the doctrines I preached to you, are now my support, and blessed be God, they are without a flaw. May the Lord bless and prosper your church. He designs good for it yet, I trust.”

To a person from Princeton, he said, “Give my love to the people of Princeton, and tell them that I am going to die, and that I am not afraid to die.” He would sometimes cry out, “The Lord Jesus will

take care of his cause in this world!" Upon awaking the next morning, he exclaimed, "Oh what a disappointment I have met with—I expected, this morning to have been in heaven!" On account of extreme weakness, he was unable to speak much during this day, but what he did say was the language of triumph. The next morning, with a pleasing smile on his countenance, he cried out, "O, I shall triumph over every foe. The Lord hath given me the victory. I exult—I triumph. O that I could see untainted purity! Now I know that it is impossible that faith should not triumph over earth and hell." "I think I have nothing to do but to die. Yet, perhaps I have—Lord show me my task." He then said, "Lord Jesus, into thy hands I commend my spirit—I do it with confidence—I do it with full assurance. I know that thou wilt keep that which I have committed to thee. I have been dreaming too fast of the time of my departure, for I find it does not come; but the Lord is faithful, and will not tarry beyond the appointed time."

In the afternoon of this day, the Rev. Elihu Spencer called to see him, and said, "I have come, dear Sir, to see you confirm by facts the gospel you have been preaching, pray Sir, how do you feel?" To which he replied, "full of triumph—I triumph through Christ. Nothing clips my wings, but the thoughts of my dissolution being prolonged. O, that it were to night! My very soul thirsts for eter-

nal rest." Mr. Spencer asked him, "what he saw in eternity to excite such vehement desires?" "I see," said he, "the eternal love and goodness of God. I see the fulness of the Mediator. I see the love of Jesus. . . O to be dissolved, and to be with Him! I long to be clothed with the complete righteousness of Christ." He then desired Mr. Spencer to pray with him, before they parted, and said, "I have gained the victory over the devil. Pray to God to preserve me from evil—to keep me from dishonouring his great name in this critical hour; and to support me with his presence in my passage through the valley of the shadow of death."

The remainder of the evening he spent in taking leave of his friends, and blessing and exhorting such of his children as were present. He would frequently cry out, "Why move the tardy hours so slow?" The next day terminated the conflict. He was no longer able to speak, but a friend having desired him to give a token by which it might be known, whether he still continued to triumph, he lifted up his hand, and uttered the word "YES." About nine o'clock, he fell into a profound sleep, and appeared to be much more free from pain than he had been for many days before. He continued to sleep without changing his position, till about one o'clock, when he expired, without a sigh or a groan. During his whole sickness he was never heard to utter a repining word, and in taking leave

of his dearest friends, he was never seen to shed a tear, or to exhibit any sign of sorrow.

His death occurred on the 16th of July, 1766, in the fifty-first year of his age.

It was the purpose of Dr. Finley's friends to have his remains removed to Princeton, and buried with his illustrious predecessors, who lie interred in the cemetery of that place; but the heat of the weather rendered it inconvenient to carry the body so far, and therefore he was buried by the side of his dear friend, Gilbert Tennent, within the Second Presbyterian church. When this church was enlarged, the remains of both these venerable men were removed to the common burying ground of the congregation. Agreeably to his dying request, his body was carried to the grave, by eight members of the senior class of the College of New Jersey. The Trustees of the College, to show their respect for the deceased, caused a cenotaph to be erected in the cemetery of Princeton, in a line with the tombs of the other presidents, whose remains are there entombed.

Dr. Finley was a person of low stature, and of a round and ruddy countenance. In the pulpit he was solemn, sensible, and sententious; and sometimes glowed with fervid animation. He was remarkable for sweetness of temper, politeness, and generosity. He was also distinguished for diligence and punctuality in the performance of all his duties.

His sermons were rather solid, than brilliant; not hasty productions, but composed with care; and while they were in a style pleasing to the cultivated mind, they were, at the same time, intelligible by the illiterate.

Dr. Finley was twice married; first, to Sarah Hall, by whom he had eight children. She died in the year 1760, before he left Nottingham. His second wife was Ann Clarkson, daughter of Mr. Clarkson, merchant of New York, who was a lineal descendant of the Rev. David Clarkson, B.D., one of the two thousand ministers, ejected for non-conformity in England, in the year 1662. His second wife survived him forty-one years. His son Ebenezer Finley, was a physician in Charleston, S. C., where his descendents still dwell and are respectable, and generally pious. One of his daughters was married to Samuel Breeze, Esq., of Shrewsbury, New Jersey, who was the mother of the wife of the Rev. Jedediah Morse, D.D.; consequently, the ingenious and respectable sons of Dr. Morse, now resident in the city of New York, are the great grandsons of Dr. Finley.

Dr. Finley wrote no work of any considerable size; but published several sermons and essays, which however are nearly out of print. In 1741, he published a sermon on Matt. xii. 28, entitled, "CHRIST TRIUMPHING AND SATAN RAGING." In 1743, "A REFUTATION OF MR. THOMPSON'S SER-

MON ON CONVICTION.” And in the same year, a treatise against the Moravians, entitled “SATAN STRIPPED OF HIS EVANGELICAL ROBE.”

In 1747, a Treatise against the Antipedobaptism of Abel Morgan, entitled, “A PLEA FOR THE SPEECHLESS.”

And in 1749, he published a sermon, preached at the ordination of the Rev. Dr. Rodgers, at St. George’s, March, 1749.

Also, a sermon on the death of the Rev. Samuel Davies, his predecessor in the college, which is prefixed to most editions of Davies’s Sermons.

To which may be added, “A Sermon, occasioned by the death of the Rev. Gilbert Tennent,” preached in the Second Presbyterian Church, Philadelphia.

It would be desirable, if we had the materials, to give a history of the flourishing and important academical institutions which arose out of the Log College, and which were conducted on the same principles, and with the same views, by men who had received their education in that school. And it would be gratifying to our readers, we doubt not, if we were to annex some biographical account of the eminent men who proceeded from these academies, prior to the erection of the College of New Jersey. Such, for example, as the Rev. Samuel Davies, the Rev. John Rodgers, D.D., the Rev. Dr. McWhorter, the Rev. Mr. Cumming, and the Rev. Dr. Waddel; but this would carry us much beyond our prescribed

limits; and in regard to several of the most distinguished of the persons mentioned, would lead us over ground which has already been occupied by abler hands.