

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.

BY WILLIAM B. SPRAGUE, D. D.

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District of New York.

The remains of Mr. Rankin lie interred in the grave-yard of the church, which, for so many years, had been the scene of his labours. Over his grave is a marble slab, with the following inscription:—

“In memory of
 THE REV. JOHN RANKIN,
 Who departed this life, March 2d, 1798,
 Aged 48 years;
 A burning and shining light in this part of Christ's
 Vineyard, 20 years.
 In mental improvement, excelled by few;
 As a divine, well instructed
 In the mysteries of Christ's Kingdom;
 Taught by his Master to give each their meat
 In due season;
 In private and public life beloved by all
 Who knew him;
 A faithful, diligent pastor;
 A tender husband; an indulgent parent;
 Lovely and pleasant in his life.
 Servant of Jesus, here repose in peace;
 Thy course is finished; won the heavenly prize;
 Henceforth, a glorious crown of righteousness
 And endless bliss await thee in the skies.”

I am, with much respect,
 Your friend and brother,

ISAAC W. K. HANDY.

WILLIAM GRAHAM.

1775—1799.

FROM THE REV. ARCHIBALD ALEXANDER, D. D.

PRINCETON, November 23, 1849.

Rev. and dear Sir: In complying with your request for some notices of the life and character of my former instructor and friend the Rev. William Graham, I shall avail myself chiefly of an Address which I delivered, some years ago, before the Alumni of Washington College, and which, upon examination, I find to be entirely in accordance with my present impressions.

WILLIAM GRAHAM was born on the 19th of December, 1745, in the township of Paxton, near Harrisburg, in Lancaster County, (now Dauphine,) in Pennsylvania. His father was a plain farmer, in moderate circumstances, and emigrated from the North of Ireland, as did also his mother, whose name before marriage was Susannah Miller. Mr. Roan was the Pastor of the Presbyterian Church in Paxton, which was much larger a hundred years ago than at present, owing to the fact that the Germans have bought out most of the original settlers, who were Scotch and Irish. Until the age of manhood, Mr. Graham was brought up in the business of agriculture, which he understood well, and of which he was always fond. But, at this period of his life, having undergone a great change in his religious views and feelings, he resolved to prepare for the work of the holy ministry. The obstacles in his way were indeed great: but being encouraged by the counsels, and aided by the efforts and prayers, of a most excel-

lent mother, to whom he attributed, in a great measure, his success in this important enterprise, he ventured, under all discouragements, to go forward in endeavouring to obtain a liberal education, depending on the guidance and aid of Divine Providence. Having prepared himself for admission to the College of New Jersey, he entered that institution, in company with a number of young men, who became eminent in the Church or State. Among whom, as a scholar, he stood pre-eminent; for, during the college course, he gained a whole year; that is, he anticipated the studies of the Senior year before the class entered on them, and was permitted to retire from College till the time of the examination of his class, when he attended with them, and was graduated in the year 1773. As his father was unable conveniently to bear the expenses of his son, while at College, he contributed to his own support, by teaching in the grammar school, then under the special direction of Dr. Witherspoon, the President of the College. Having completed his college course, he pursued his theological studies under the tuition of the Rev. Mr. Roan, a divine of considerable distinction. But, during the whole period of his education, he was constantly engaged in the study of Theology. Among all his teachers, however, he gave the preference to his excellent mother; and has been heard to say that he learned more of practical religion from her, than from all persons and books beside. He was licensed to preach by the Presbytery of Hanover, on the 26th of October, 1775.

When the Hanover Presbytery determined to establish a school for the rearing of young men for the ministry, they applied to the Rev. Samuel Stanhope Smith, then itinerating in the State of Virginia, to recommend a suitable person to take charge of their school,—upon which, he at once recommended Mr. Graham, and at their request wrote to him to come on to the Valley of Virginia. Before this time, a classical school had been taught at a place called Mount Pleasant, near to the little town of Fairfield. Here Mr. Graham commenced his labours as a teacher; and here we find the germ whence sprung Washington College.

It was not long, however, before it was judged expedient to remove the infant school to Timber Ridge Meeting-House, where a convenient house for the Rector was built, and also an Academy, and other small buildings for the accommodation of the students. A considerable sum was now raised by subscription for the purchase of books and a philosophical apparatus, and Mr. Graham was entrusted with the business of selecting and purchasing such articles as he should judge most useful and necessary; and, accordingly, he took a journey to Philadelphia, and executed judiciously the trust reposed in him. He also travelled into New England, to solicit benefactions for the rising Academy, and not without some success, though not very considerable. At this time, the prospects of the infant institution were very encouraging, and if no untoward events had occurred, there is reason to believe that it would speedily have risen to great eminence and usefulness. But the Revolutionary war having burst on the country, threatening ruin and desolation, the attention of all *true* men was turned to the defence of the country; and from no part of the United States, it is believed, did more young men enter the public service, than from the region to which I am now referring. And it may truly be said that the patriotic fire burned in no bosom with a warmer flame, than in that of Mr. Graham himself. On a certain occasion, when, by invitation of the Executive authority of the State,

it was resolved to raise a volunteer company of riflemen, to go into active service, there appeared much backwardness in the men to come forward,—he stepped out, and had his own name enrolled, which produced such an effect that the company was immediately filled, of which he was unanimously chosen Captain; and all necessary preparations were made for marching to the seat of war, when General Washington signified to the Governors of the States, that he did not wish any more volunteer companies to join the army.

The abandonment of the houses erected at Timber Ridge, appears to have taken place,—though without authority,—as a matter of necessity. The income from the Academy was small, and his salary for preaching to the two Congregations of Timber Ridge and Hall's Meeting-House, (now Monmouth,) being paid in depreciated currency, it was impossible for him to support his family. He, therefore, resolved to return to farming, and, accordingly, he purchased a small farm on the North River, within a mile or two of the present site of Washington College.

The school at Timber Ridge was, however, continued for some time after Mr. Graham retired to his farm, and he endeavoured to perform the duties of a Rector, by visiting it, and giving instruction, several times in each week. But this being found very inconvenient to himself, and disadvantageous to the school, after due deliberation, he resolved to relinquish the establishment at Timber Ridge, and to open a school in his own house. It was here that, at an early age, I commenced my course of classical learning. Even at this time, there was a respectable number of students in the school, most of them having reached the age and stature of men. After some time, a frame edifice was erected on ground given for the purpose, and the school was continued until, in the year 1782, application was made to the Legislature for an Act of Incorporation, and, accordingly, a number of Trustees were formed into a body corporate, to have full charge of the Academy, which received the name of LIBERTY HALL,—which name it retained until it was endowed by General Washington, when his name was substituted for that which it had before borne. Before this donation was received, Mr. Graham had resigned his office as Rector or President, though it is understood that he used all his influence to secure this important endowment; and that he was the author of the letter addressed to General Washington, by the Trustees, in favour of this institution.

Though Mr. Graham had some formidable opposers, who had taken up strong prejudices against him, and although, after the close of the war, the character of the students who attended at the Academy was greatly deteriorated, and the difficulties which environed him were many and perplexing; yet it must be conceded that, in resigning his important post at this time, he was not guided by his usual wisdom. It is not expedient, perhaps, to bring distinctly into view, in this connection, the disappointment which attended his favourite scheme of planting in the West a little colony of select families of like mind, who might live in peace, far from the contentions, bustle, and turmoil of the world. All such schemes must fail in the present state of human nature.

Mr. Graham possessed a mind formed for accurate and profound investigation. He had studied the Latin and Greek classics with great care, and relished the beauties of these exquisite compositions. With those authors taught in the schools, he was familiar by a long practice in teaching, and

always insisted on the importance of classical literature, as the proper foundation of a liberal education.

He had a strong inclination to the study of Natural Philosophy, and took pleasure in making experiments, with such apparatus as he possessed; and he had procured for his Academy as good a one as was then possessed by most of the Colleges. In these experiments much time was employed, on which inquisitive persons, not connected with the Academy, were freely permitted to attend.

As he was an ardent patriot and a thorough republican, the times in which he lived led him to bestow much attention on the science of government; and one of the few pieces which he wrote for the press was on this subject. By some he was censured for meddling with politics; but it should be remembered that, at that time, this country, having cast off its allegiance to Great Britain, and declared itself independent, had to lay the foundation of governments both for the States and for the Nation; and that the welfare of posterity, as well as of the existing inhabitants of the country, was involved in the wisdom with which this work was done. The talents of every man, capable of thinking and judging on such subjects, seemed to be fairly put into requisition. It is a sound maxim that men living at one time must not be judged by the maxims of an age in which all circumstances are greatly changed. At the adoption of the Federal Constitution, which, according to its original draft, he did not approve, he relinquished all attention to politics during the remainder of his life.

The science, however, which engaged his attention more than all others, except Theology, was the Philosophy of the Mind. In this he took great delight, and to it he devoted much time and attention. Though acquainted with the best treatises which had then been published, his investigations were not carried on so much by books, as by a patient and repeated analysis of the various processes of thought, as they arose in his own mind, and by reducing the phenomena thus observed to a regular system. I am of opinion that the system of mental philosophy which he thus formed, was, in clearness and fulness, superior to any thing which has been given to the public, in the numerous works which have recently been published on this subject. And it is greatly to be regretted that his Lectures were never fully committed to writing, and published for the benefit of the world. It was, however, a fault in this man of profound thought, that he made little use of his pen. And it was also a defect that, in the latter years of his life, he addicted himself little to reading the productions of other men, and perhaps entertained too low an opinion of the value of books.

But you will wish to know something more particularly of Mr. Graham as a theologian and a preacher. From the time of his ordination by the Presbytery of Hanover in 1775, he became a teacher of Theology. Most of those who entered the holy ministry in the Valley of Virginia, pursued their preparatory studies under his direction. And, after the great revival which commenced in the year 1789, he had a theological class of seven or eight members, under his tuition, which was kept up for several years. It was his custom to devote one day in the week to hearing the written discourses of these candidates, and to a free discussion of theological points. In these exercises he appeared to take great delight; and the students were always gratified, and commonly convinced, by his lucid statements and cogent reasonings. As most of those who enjoyed the benefit of his instruc-

tions in this incipient Theological Seminary are not now in the world, it may not be improper to say that some of them rose to eminence in the Church, and as Professors or Presidents of literary institutions. The influence which he gained over the minds of his pupils, while under his care, was unbounded. Yet he encouraged the utmost freedom of discussion, and seemed to aim, not so much to bring his pupils to think as he did, as to teach them to think on all subjects for themselves. A slavish subjection to any human authority he repudiated; and, therefore, never attempted to add weight to his opinions, by referring to a long list of authors, of great name; but uniformly insisted that all opinions should be subjected to the test of Scripture and reason. Some of his students have been heard to say that the chief benefit which they derived from his instructions, was that, by this means, they were led to the free and independent exercise of their own faculties in the investigation of truth.

Mr. Graham, in his theological creed, was strictly orthodox, according to the standards of his own Church, which he greatly venerated; but, in his method of explaining some of the knotty points in Theology, he departed considerably from the common track; and was of opinion that many things which have been involved in perplexity and obscurity, by the manner in which they have been treated, are capable of being easily and satisfactorily explained by the application of sound principles of philosophy. As a preacher, he was always instructive and evangelical; though in common his delivery was rather feeble and embarrassed than forcible; but when his feelings were excited, his voice became penetrating, and his whole manner awakening and impressive. And his profound study of the human heart enabled him to describe the various exercises of the Christian with a clearness and truth which often greatly surprised his pious hearers; for it seemed to them as if he could read the very inmost sentiments of their minds; which he described more perfectly than they could do themselves. When it was his object to elucidate some more difficult point, it was his custom to open his trenches, so to speak, at a great distance; removing out of the way every obstacle, until he was prepared to make his assault on the main fortress: thus, insensibly, he led his hearers along, step by step, gaining their assent, first to one proposition, and then to another; until, at last, they could not easily avoid acquiescence in the conclusion to which he wished to bring them. As a clear and cogent reasoner, he had no superior among his contemporaries; and his pre-eminence in the exercise of this faculty was acknowledged by all unprejudiced persons.

It has been hinted that Mr. Graham had enemies, who often had influence to impede or thwart his favourite schemes; and candour requires that it should be acknowledged that he sometimes imprudently made enemies of those who might have been efficient friends, by too free an indulgence of satirical and sarcastical remarks; which weapon he could wield with great power. And it must also be conceded that towards his opponents he never manifested much of a conciliatory temper, but seemed rather disposed to stand aloof from them, and to set them at defiance.

In the government of youth, Mr. Graham was, from the first, a rigid and unyielding disciplinarian. He laid it down as a principle that, at every risk, authority must be maintained; and when this was by any one resisted, however formidable the student might be in physical strength, or however many might combine to frustrate the regular exercise of discipline, he fear-

lessly went forward in the discharge of his duty, and generally triumphed over all opposition; and often inflicted severe castigation on the thoughtless persons, who dared to rebel against lawful authority. Whether his rigour might not, in some instances, have been extreme, is a question on which judicious men would differ in opinion.

As has been already hinted, the great error of his life was the relinquishment of the important station in which Providence had placed him, and for which he was so eminently qualified; and *that* at a time of life when he possessed the ability of being more useful than at any former period. Having removed to the banks of Ohio River, he fell into great embarrassments, in the midst of which he died, in consequence of a violent fever contracted by exposure to frequent drenching rains, while on a journey to Richmond. In that city he breathed his last, on the 8th of June, 1799, in the house of his friend, the late Colonel Robert Gamble; and his remains were deposited near the Episcopal Church on the hill, over which a plain marble slab, with a short inscription, is placed.

Mr. Graham was married to a young woman in Carlisle, by the name of Mary Kerr. They had two sons and three daughters who lived to mature age. His eldest son entered the ministry, and, after licensure, was stationed in Prince George County, below Petersburg, where he contracted a bilious fever that proved fatal. His only other son who grew to manhood, was his youngest child, and was taken by James Priestley, LL. D., and educated out of gratitude for Mr. Graham's kindness in giving him a liberal education. He studied medicine, lived in Georgia, and was hopefully converted among the Methodists, of which society he became a member, and died a few years since.

The extent of the influence exerted by this one man over the literature and religion of Virginia, cannot be calculated. As the stream which fertilizes a large district is small in its origin, but goes on continually increasing until it becomes a mighty river, so the influence of the Rev. William Graham did not cease when he died, but has gone on increasing by means of his disciples, who have been scattered far and wide over the West and South.

Yours truly,

A. ALEXANDER.