

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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VOLUME III.

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BY ROBERT CARTER & BROTHERS,

In the Clerk's Office of the District Court of the United States for the Southern  
District of New York.

“In memory of  
 THE REV. DR. JAMES LATTA,  
 Who died 29th January, 1801, in the 68th year of his age.  
 By his death, society has lost an invaluable member;  
 Religion one of its brightest ornaments, and most amiable examples.  
 His genius was masterly, and his literature extensive.  
 As a classical scholar, he was excelled by few.  
 His judgment was strong and penetrating;  
 His taste correct, his style nervous and elegant.

In the pulpits he was a model.  
 In the judicatures of the Church, distinguished by his accuracy and precision  
 After a life devoted to his Master's service,  
 He rested from his labours, lamented most by those who knew his worth.  
 Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth;  
 Yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labours,  
 And their works do follow them.”

With respect and affection,

Your brother in Jesus,

ROBERT P. DU BOIS.

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## ALEXANDER McWHORTER, D. D.\*

1758—1807.

ALEXANDER McWHORTER was of Scotch extraction,—his ancestors, on both sides, having emigrated from Scotland to the North of Ireland. Both of his maternal grandparents lost their lives in the great Irish massacre of 1641, being hanged on a tree before their own door. None of the family survived this horrid scene, except his mother, who, being an infant at the time, was saved by being concealed by her nurse. His immediate parents, Hugh and Jane McWhorter, lived in the County of Armagh, where his father was, for many years, a linen merchant. Their eldest child, whose name was *Alexander*, was distinguished for his talents and piety, and spent two years at the University of Edinburgh, with an intention to devote himself to the Gospel ministry. At his solicitation the family removed to America, about the year 1730, and settled in the County of Newcastle, De., where his father was an extensive farmer, and an elder of the church of which the Rev. John Rodgers (afterwards Dr. Rodgers of New York), became pastor. Alexander died before he had completed his studies; and the subject of this sketch, being born about a month after, bore his brother's name.

The second *Alexander*, the youngest of eleven children, was born July 15, (O. S.) 1734. His parents being eminently pious persons, were especially solicitous for his moral and religious welfare, and lost no opportunity of impressing early upon his mind the great truths and duties of Christianity. In February, 1748, when he was in his fourteenth year, his father

went to Pennsylvania, and on the 5th of January, 1796, was installed pastor of the Church in Pequea, as successor to the Rev. Dr. Robert Smith. His relation with this congregation was dissolved, May 1, 1818. After this, he preached a few months in Lancaster, and occasionally supplied his former charge. In 1819, he removed to Cincinnati; and while there, was attacked with an affection of the eye, by which he partially lost his sight. In 1825, he removed from Cincinnati to Zanesville, where he died of hemorrhage of the lungs in February, 1827. He was distinguished for his common sense and firmness of purpose, and for the brevity, point, and effectiveness, of his sermons.

\* Griffins Fun. Serm.—Stearns' Hist. First Ch., Newark.

died, leaving four children; and, as three of them were already settled in North Carolina, their mother, in the following autumn, removed into that Province, accompanied by Alexander, who left his paternal estate in Delaware, under the care of a guardian. Here he became most deeply impressed with a sense of his sinfulness, under a sermon preached by the Rev. John Brown, (I suppose of Timber Ridge, Va.,) and, for nearly three years, he was well nigh overwhelmed with anxiety and distress. After remaining in Carolina, probably between two and three years, he came to the North to receive his education under the direction of his guardian. Having studied for a short time at a school in the village of Newark, De., he became a member of Mr. Finley's famous school at West Nottingham, Pa.; and it was there that he first found relief from the spiritual burden that had so long oppressed him, and made a public profession of his faith by becoming a member of Mr. Finley's church.

He remained at this school for two years. In May, 1756, being in his twenty-second year, he joined the Junior class in the College of New Jersey, then at Newark, though removed the next year to Princeton. He graduated in the autumn of 1757,—a few days after the lamented death of President Burr.

Just as he was about returning to Carolina to visit his mother, and to seek her counsel in regard to his future course of life, he was met by the afflictive intelligence of her death; in consequence of which, he changed his purpose, and immediately commenced the study of Theology under the direction of the Rev. William Tennent of Freehold. He was licensed to preach by the Presbytery of New Brunswick in August, 1758. In October following, he was married to Mary, daughter of Robert Cumming of Freehold, High Sheriff of the County of Monmouth, and a relative of his instructor, Mr. Tennent. They had five children, two of whom entered the profession of Law.

The Congregation at Newark, N. J., had been in a distracted state from the time of Mr. Burr's dismissal; and, though they had employed several candidates, they had found it impossible to unite upon any one of them. It was in this unhappy state of things that Mr. McWhorter went among them to preach in June, 1759; and they immediately and unitedly resolved to secure his permanent services. He had been previously designated by the Synod of New York and Philadelphia to a mission among his friends in North Carolina; and, with that view, he was ordained by his Presbytery at Cranberry, on the 4th of July. But, at that very meeting of Presbytery, Commissioners from Newark appeared, and by their solicitations, seconded by the influence of Mr. Tennent, obtained him for a supply. The result was that he, soon after, received a unanimous call to become their pastor, and was installed as such about the close of summer,—being then twenty-five years of age.

In 1764, the Synod renewed his appointment to the mission into North Carolina; but though this gave him an opportunity of visiting his friends, after a separation from them of twelve years, it came very near costing him his life. While in Carolina he was attacked with a bilious fever incident to the climate, which left him with an affection of the lungs which, for two years, seemed likely to have a fatal issue. But, in the midst of this scene of affliction, in the winter of 1764-65, he was permitted to hear of an extensive revival of religion in his own congregation. In the following

summer, he received a call from the united Congregations of Center and Poplar Tent in North Carolina; which, though it afforded him an opportunity to settle among his father's children and descendants, he thought it his duty to decline. In 1766, he was induced to try the effect upon his health of a northern journey; and that journey, extended as far as Boston, proved unexpectedly the means of his entire restoration. And from that period, his health, with some very slight exceptions, continued vigorous until old age.

Shortly after his return from Boston, overtures were made to him from the congregation in that town, which had some time before become vacant by the death of his brother-in-law, the Rev. Alexander Cumming, to become their pastor; or rather, as they had scruples about calling a settled minister,—to resign his charge at Newark, with a view to accepting a call from them; but he declined the preliminary step, and the matter went no farther.

In 1772, a second revival of religion commenced, which proved even more extensive than the former, and continued about two years.

Mr. McWhorter partook largely of the sacrifices and hardships attendant on the American Revolution. In 1775, he was appointed by Congress to visit that district of North Carolina in which he had been before, with a view to do what he could to bring over the enemies of the Revolution to the American cause; but the enterprise seems to have been, on the whole, unsuccessful.

In 1776, he was honoured with the Degree of Doctor of Divinity by the Corporation of Yale College.

In the following winter, when the prospects of the American cause had become the darkest, and Washington had fled through New Jersey with a handful of troops, almost ready to perish from starvation, this patriotic minister hastened to the army encamped on the Pennsylvania shore, opposite Trenton, to concert, with the Commander-in-chief, measures for the protection of the State. And he was there on the memorable 26th of December, when the American troops crossed the Delaware, took the Hessians, and thus gave a new direction to the events of the war.

In the summer of 1778, at the solicitation of General Knox, he consented to become Chaplain of his brigade, which then lay with the main army at White Plains. During the few months that he was thus employed, Washington was often his hearer, and he was often Washington's guest. His resignation of the Chaplaincy was hastened by the fact that, in July of that year, Mrs. McWhorter was struck with lightning, and for the time was left without any symptom of life; and though she recovered her senses after a few hours, the shock to her constitution was such that her husband felt it necessary that he should return home earlier than he would otherwise have done, to attend to the concerns of his family.

In November of this year, he received a call from the Congregational Church in Charleston, S. C., to become their pastor. This call he was somewhat inclined to accept, and kept it under consideration till February following; but the state of his family, and the critical situation of Charleston, then threatened with invasion, finally determined him to decline it.

The next summer, (1779,) he received a call from the Congregation of Charlotte, Mecklenburg County, N. C., to become their pastor, and at the same time an invitation from the Trustees of Charlotte Academy, to

become the President of that institution. The promising character of this infant seminary; the fact that it was situated among his relations; and in a part of the country supposed to be comparatively secure from hostile invasion; in connection with the fact that his salary, owing to the deranged state of his congregation, had become insufficient for the support of his family,—led him to think that it was his duty to accept the call; and his congregation did not feel at liberty, under existing circumstances, to oppose his removal. His pastoral relation to the church was accordingly dissolved, and in October following, he took his leave of Newark, amidst the warmest testimonies of affection and regret from his afflicted people.

This removal, however, proved any thing else than a fortunate affair. Scarcely was he settled in his new habitation, when the army of Cornwallis, scouring the country, entered Charlotte, and compelled him to fly with his family for safety. On his return, he found that his library, and furniture, and almost every thing that he possessed, had been sacrificed. Apprehending further attacks from the enemy, he determined again to set his face towards the North; and, accordingly, in the autumn of 1780, he came with his family to Abington, Pa., where he engaged to preach for the winter. The people of Newark, hearing of his misfortunes, invited him to make them a visit,—which he did in February, 1781. Soon after, they sent him a regular call, in consequence of which he returned in April with his family; and, though he was never reinstated, he acted as pastor of the Congregation till his death.

In the summer of 1783, the Trustees of Washington Academy, in Somerset County, Md., offered him the Presidency of that institution, with a liberal salary. But, though the institution was specially designed for the education of young men for the ministry, and was in a part of the country where there was a wide field for ministerial labour, yet such was his attachment to his Congregation, especially in view of the then recent proofs of their affectionate regard, that he scarcely felt at liberty even to consider the application.

In 1784, another revival of religion occurred in connection with his labours, which continued also two years. Into this revival he entered with extraordinary interest,—preaching not only on the Sabbath, but several times in the week, and spending a part of almost every day in catechising, visiting from house to house, and holding private religious meetings.

Dr. McWhorter was one of those eminent men who, in 1788, had the principal agency in settling the Confession of Faith, and forming the Constitution of the Presbyterian Church of the United States; and in transferring the authority of the highest judicatory from the Synod to the General Assembly, which met first in May, 1789. When a Board of Trustees for the General Assembly was incorporated by the Legislature of Pennsylvania, ten years afterwards, he was named in the Charter as one of the Board; and he continued to hold this trust until 1803, when the infirmities of age induced him to resign it.

In 1796, another revival of religion occurred in his congregation, by means of which thirty or forty were added to the church. In 1802, there was yet another, and the last, revival under his ministry, which continued two years; during which a hundred and forty were admitted to communion beside those that were received from other churches.

After the burning of the Princeton College edifice in 1802, Dr. McWhorter was requested by the Trustees of that institution to visit New England, to solicit contributions in aid of erecting a new building. Such was the interest that he felt in the welfare of the College, that, notwithstanding the infirmities of age were upon him, he cheerfully undertook the mission, and was able, in due time, to make a report, creditable alike to his own sagacity and perseverance, and to the liberality of the people of New England.

The following beautiful incident in Dr. McWhorter's life was related, if I mistake not, by the Doctor himself, to the Rev. Dr. Miller of Princeton, who thus communicated it to the Rev. Dr. Murray of Elizabethtown:—

“After an absence of many years from his native place, he resolved, a little before his death, to visit once more the spot on which he was born. In his little carriage, driven by a coloured servant, he went, by slow stages, from his home in Newark to his early home in Delaware. Driving up to the door of the house in which he was born,—now old and dilapidated, he asked a woman who came to the door, *who* lived there. Being answered, he again asked, who lived there before *them*. Having received a reply, he again asked, ‘who lived there before *them*?’ The woman could not tell. He then asked if she had ever heard of a family who once lived there by the name of *McWhorter*? ‘What name, did you say?’—said the woman. ‘McWhorter,’ replied the Doctor. ‘I never heard of such a family,’ said she. He then drove to a neighbouring house, where his uncle, a brother of his father, used to live. He asked the same questions, and received the same answers. Returning to the house of his birth, he left his carriage, and asked for a tumbler, saying,—‘there is one place here that knows me, and that I know.’ And, leaning on the arm of his servant, he hobbled to a spring at the bottom of the garden, from which he used to drink, when a boy. He stood over it for some time, and drank of its waters, until he could drink no more. He then hobbled back to his carriage, repeating these words, as he entered it,—the tears streaming from his eyes,—‘The places that now know us, will know us no more forever.’”

On the evening of the 25th of December, 1806, he received an injury from a fall, from which he never recovered. In February following, when the dissolution of his aged wife was manifestly approaching, and he was himself rapidly sinking under manifold infirmities, one of his sons died so suddenly that his parents, though in the neighbourhood, were not apprized of his illness till they heard of his death. But he behaved with the most serene and dignified composure under the trial. On the 2d of April following, the beloved companion of his life finished her course with all the tokens of childlike piety; and this affliction he endured, like that which had preceded it, in the spirit of unqualified submission and humble trust. Nothing now remained but to make the immediate arrangements for his own departure. He sent an affectionate farewell to his brethren of the Presbytery; distributed his volumes of Sermons among his children, grandchildren, and other relatives, and gave directions in respect to his funeral. He lingered, in the utmost patience, and sometimes in the triumphs of a rapturous faith, till the 20th of July, 1807, when he gently passed away to the better world. His Funeral Sermon was preached by his colleague, the Rev. Edward D. Griffin, and was published.

Dr. McWhorter published a Sermon on the blessedness of the liberal, 1796; and two octavo volumes of Sermons, 1803.

FROM THE HON. JACOB BURNET,

JUDGE OF THE SUPREME COURT OF OHIO.

CINCINNATI, September 29, 1848

Rev. and dear Sir: You ask me for my recollections of the Rev. Dr. McWhorter. One of my very earliest recollections of any body or any thing, is the effect that was produced on my mind, by seeing that venerable man in the pulpit, in the clerical robes, and large full wig, worn by the clergy of that day. I knew him well, both in the pulpit and out of it, as I was growing up, and I am glad, even at this late period of my life, to testify my veneration for his character.

Dr. McWhorter was grave and dignified in his deportment—though far from being stern or repulsive, he seldom indulged in any very decided expressions of merriment. His temper was naturally quick, but was under such habitual control that the tendency to irritability was not often discovered, even by those who were most frequently in his company. His talents were much above mediocrity. He was a good classical scholar, and as a preacher, was among the most popular of his day.

The trait of character for which he was perhaps most distinguished was prudence. In the discharge of his duty to his congregation, individually as well as collectively, he showed himself at once very wise and very successful. Such was the confidence they reposed in him, that when they found themselves involved in any difficulty, they were almost sure to apply to him for advice, and the course he recommended, scarcely ever failed to secure the desired result.

During his unusually long ministry at Newark, controversies among the members of his church occasionally arose, which sometimes became widely extended, and were carried on with no inconsiderable warmth. On such occasions, each party resorted to the Doctor for counsel; and although, in some cases, it appeared impossible to interpose, without giving offence to one side or the other, yet his great practical wisdom always enabled him to get through the difficulty without losing the confidence of either party.

I will mention two occurrences which, though not important in themselves, may throw some light on the Doctor's general character.

A young respectable girl of his congregation fell violently in love with one of her associates, who, unfortunately, did not reciprocate her affection, and who therefore, very naturally, was not disposed to marry her. In the bitterness of her disappointment, she repaired to her minister for advice and assistance. After hearing her story, he made a visit to the young man, to ascertain the facts of the case, and was convinced that the young lady had no just claims on him, nor any grounds of complaint against him. This result he communicated to her; and at the same time advised her to banish the subject from her mind and forget him. This she declared was impossible. On a subsequent visit, she intimated to the Doctor a determination to put an end to her existence. He very promptly replied, "Why Rhoda, I admire your courage—it is the best thing you can do; and I advise you not to put it off a single hour, lest you should change your mind. Come, my chaise is at the door; I will take you to the river immediately, and see that the work is thoroughly done." She thanked the Doctor for his proffered kindness, but on the whole, thought she had better not just then avail herself of it.

The other circumstance to which I referred, took place very soon after Dr. Griffin became associated with him as colleague pastor. There was a very pious man belonging to the congregation, with whom I was personally acquainted, who had not formally joined the church, on account of some doubts which agitated his mind, but which I forbear to state, lest I might do it incorrectly. While this obstacle existed, his infant child was taken violently ill, during the temporary absence of Dr. McWhorter. The distressed father, who inclined to the

opinion that baptism was essential to salvation, sent for Dr. Griffin, and requested him to baptize the child, which he declined to do, on the ground that neither of the parents was a member of the church; and he persisted in this refusal, regardless of the entreaties and tears of the father, till the infant expired, unbaptized. Dr. Griffin was himself deeply agitated and distressed,—fearing that he might have done wrong. In that state of mind, he called on his venerable colleague immediately after his return, and having stated the case, asked him what he would have done in the same circumstances. “Why,” said Dr. McWhorter, “it is very likely that I should have baptized the child first, and then have examined the subject to satisfy my mind whether I had done right or not.” I mention this as an illustration of the strength and tenderness of his sympathies.

Very respectfully your friend,

J. BURNET.

#### FROM THE REV. AARON CONDUCT.

HANOVER, N. J., April 15, 1850.

Rev. and dear Sir: My acquaintance with Dr. McWhorter began, when I was about sixteen years of age. I was at that time placed in the Grammar School, as it was then called, which he had commenced with the view of aiding in the support of his family, during the hard times of the Revolutionary war, then in progress. My respect and affection were at once awakened towards him, and continued ever afterwards. There was a noble manliness in his countenance, person, and movements, which could not fail to impress me favourably.

As a teacher, I was, from the first, greatly delighted with him. He was remarkably a man of order and method. He was so communicative,—inparted instruction with so much ease, and was, in all respects, so paternal, that I considered it a high privilege to be under his instruction. He really impressed me with the idea that he knew almost every thing. To meet the difficulty of procuring books suitable for such a school, he wrote for his pupils, with his own hand, treatises on several of the sciences.

As a preacher, Dr. McWhorter was plain, instructive, practical. His discourses in the pulpit were generally written out. His language was correct, impressive, and often pathetic. His prayers in public were scarcely, if at all, less correct in language, than his sermons. There was much in his manner that was expressive of sincerity and fervour. His devotional exercises were uniformly very appropriate, and always characterized by becoming brevity. I never knew him fail to recognise very particularly Christ Jesus as the only ground and medium of acceptance with a holy God for sinful man. Though his style of delivery was dignified and agreeable, he did not abound in action. But I well remember one gesture,—a certain motion of his right arm, which, in connection with his expressive countenance, often gave great effect to what he uttered.

Dr. McWhorter was distinguished as a constant and punctual attendant on the judicatories of the Church. It was a rare thing for him to be absent from any meeting of Presbytery or Synod; and when he accepted an appointment as delegate to the General Assembly, I never knew him fail of fulfilling it. It seemed to me that whenever he entered a meeting of a church judicatory, it was his object, so far as he could do it without trespassing on the rights of others, to secure a seat where he could best see as well as hear, both the Moderator and the members who might have occasion to speak; and when seated, his attention seemed never, for a moment, to be withdrawn from the business in hand. He was always ready to express his own views of any subject that might arise, at the proper time; but could never be charged with occupying the time of the judicatory unnecessarily, by either too frequent or too long speeches. No man, it

appeared to me, knew better than he, what to say, when to say it, and when to stop. He was eminently respected by the Presbyterian Church at large, and more than once had the most important public services entrusted to him.

I am, my dear Sir,

Very truly yours,

AARON CONDUCT.

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## JOHN STRAIN.\*

1759—1774.

It is somewhat remarkable that though few ministers in the Presbyterian Church enjoyed a higher reputation than JOHN STRAIN, during his lifetime, yet almost every memorial of him has perished; and, after having diligently explored every probable source of information concerning him, I have found it impossible to construct a continuous narrative of his life. Even the time and place of his birth are not known. The first that we hear of him is, his being graduated at the College of New Jersey in 1757. It has been supposed that he studied Theology under the Rev. Dr. Finley; but the fact, if it be one, is not, I believe, satisfactorily ascertained. He was licensed to preach by the Presbytery of Newcastle on the 29th of May, 1759; and was ordained *sine titulo*, by the same Presbytery, in 1761. He settled as pastor of the Churches of Chanceford and Slate Ridge, York County, Pa. Such was his popularity as a preacher, that, after the death of Gilbert Tennent, he was called to succeed him as pastor of the Second Presbyterian Church in Philadelphia; but so strong was the attachment existing between him and his congregations, that he was unwilling to leave them, and therefore declined the call. He died on the 21st of May, 1774.

The following estimate of Mr. Strain's character as a preacher was furnished me by the Rev. Archibald Alexander, D. D.:—

“The REV. JOHN STRAIN was a preacher of uncommon power and success. His manner, as I have heard from some who attended on his ministry, was awfully solemn. Many were awakened under his pungent and searching discourses; and his method of dealing with those who came to him under concern of mind, was thought to be very singular at that time. He would authoritatively exhort them to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and would then turn away from them. Sometimes, after preaching to the people, and offering Christ to them earnestly, when, after the benediction, they were going out of the house, he would rise up, and cry out in the most heart-piercing tone of inquiry—‘What! are you going away without receiving Christ into your hearts?’

“His plan of preaching was to represent to the sinner his ruined condition, and then urge him by every solemn and tender entreaty immediately to close in with the offers of mercy through the Lord Jesus Christ. I have often heard Hugh Weir, who was a subject of grace under the ministry of Mr. Strain, repeat whole sermons which he had heard him preach. His opinion was that he had never heard any preacher equal to him; and especially in the earnest and tender beseeching of sinners to be reconciled to God.

\* MSS. from Rev. Archibald Alexander, D. D., and Rev. Richard Webster.