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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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BY WILLIAM B. SPRAGUE, D. D.

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VOLUME IV.
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forego the dignity of the minister and the Christian, in the fervour of his zeal, and abstained conscientiously from religious mountebankism and buffoonery, used by some as "allowable auxiliaries to the glory of God." His views of evangelical truth were eminently clear and systematic,—his *Calvinism*, inwrought and steadfast. Towards the close of life, he gave me some of his views of these points, which I would gladly transcribe for his reputation, and the edification of younger clergymen. He spoke and wrote to me often of the consolatory and invigorating and conservative influence of the views in which he was early trained, and which he first learned at his mother's knees—a mother who yet lives to remember him as her glory, and lament him as her idol. Though he belonged, on principle, to a branch of the Church, by some considered latitudinarian in doctrine, and fanatical formerly in measures, his theology and his views of order and decorum in God's house, and human agencies, were formed early, cherished steadfastly, and cheered him to the end! He was a genuine Scotch Irish Presbyterian.

Dr. Carroll's son, from the causes adverted to, was early obscured, and set too soon, according to our imperfect conceptions. The Church lost the benefit of his matured intellect and ripened piety and experience, when usually they are most available and important. And this, by the same cause, that has robbed her prematurely of many of her jewels,—not by a "mysterious providence," but from early and unconscious infraction of final ordinations, concerning health of body and vigour of mind, and effective, prolonged usefulness. His life ought to be a beacon, as it might have been a greater blessing. But still, his memory is fragrant as a pastor and a friend, to many. His excellencies, hallowed by death, are a heritage to his family. At his grave, affection and piety will often render a tribute, worthier, but not more sincere, than that which, by your kindness, here finds a place amidst "The Annals of the American Pulpit."

Yours very truly,

D. H. RIDDLE.



ERSKINE MASON, D. D.*

1826—1851.

ERSKINE MASON was the youngest child of the Rev. John M. and Anna (Lefferts) Mason, and was born in the city of New York, April 16, 1805. He was named in honour of the Rev. Dr. Erskine of Edinburgh, from whom his father had received many expressions of kindness, while pursuing his theological studies in that city. His childhood was marked by uncommon intelligence and spirit, but not by any remarkable sedateness or love of study. In his twelfth year, he went to Schenectady to reside in the family of his brother-in-law, the Rev. Dr. Van Vechten; and there, under the instruction of the Rev. Daniel H. Barnes, his mind rapidly matured, and he acquired a stability and sobriety of character, which gave promise of a life of respectability and usefulness.

When his father, at the beginning of 1822, removed to Carlisle, and became President of Dickinson College, Erskine accompanied him, and became a member of the College. In the autumn of that year, *James Hall*,

* Memoir prefixed to his Sermons.

an elder son of Dr. Mason, and a youth of fine talents and great purity and elevation of character, who had just graduated at College, was suddenly stricken down by death. The event produced a great effect on the minds of the students, and, shortly after, there was a very general attention to religion in the institution, and many promising young men gave evidence of being renewed in the temper of their minds. Of this number was Erskine Mason.

Having entered College at an advanced standing, he graduated in 1823. He spent a considerable part of the next year at Baltimore, pursuing his theological studies under the direction of his cousin, the Rev. Dr. Duncan. In the summer session of 1825, he joined the Middle class of the Theological Seminary at Princeton, where he completed his professional education.

He was licensed to preach by the Second Presbytery of New York in 1826, and, on the 20th of October, of the same year, was ordained by the same Presbytery, in the Scotch Presbyterian Church, New York. On the 3d of May, 1827, he was installed Pastor of the Presbyterian Church in Schenectady.

On the 26th of September, 1827, he was married by his father to Ann, daughter of Dr. Samuel A. M'Coskry, and granddaughter of the celebrated Dr. Nisbet, President of Dickinson College. Mrs. Mason, with three daughters and one son, survive the husband and father.

The Congregation at Schenectady, of which Mr. Mason became Pastor, had in it much more than a common degree of intelligence, particularly as it included most of the officers and students of the College; but his sermons, from the beginning, were uncommonly rich in thought, were elaborated with great care, and while they were acceptable to all, were especially so to the more cultivated and reflecting portion of his hearers.

The Bleeker Street Presbyterian Church in New York having become vacant by the death of the Rev. Matthias Bruen, at the close of 1829, Mr. Mason was unanimously called to supply this important vacancy; and on the 10th of September, 1830, his installation, as Pastor of that Church took place.

In February, 1836, he accepted the Professorship of Ecclesiastical History in the Union Theological Seminary, and held it till 1842.

When the division of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church occurred in 1838, Mr. Mason, with his Presbytery, fell upon the New School side. He is understood to have had a very strong conviction that that was the *right* side.

In 1837, he received the degree of Doctor of Divinity from Columbia College. He was invited, at different periods, to take the charge of several prominent churches in his denomination, but he uniformly returned a negative answer.

In the year 1846, by request of his own people, who felt that he needed a season of relaxation, he crossed the ocean, and passed several months in travelling in Europe. He returned much gratified with his tour, and resumed his labours with invigorated health and increased alacrity. At this time, every thing indicated that there were many years of active usefulness before him. And thus it continued until within less than a year of his death. In August, 1850, on his return from his annual visit to the country, he felt an unwonted debility and prostration, which, though at first little

heeded, soon occasioned serious alarm. He had, however, so far recovered before the close of the year, that he was able to prepare a sermon for the New Year, which proved to be the last sermon he ever preached. He was so feeble, when he delivered it, that he was obliged to sit during the exercise. His text was—"I said, Oh my God, take me not away in the midst of my days;" and the sad apprehensions of his beloved people gave to it, at the time, the character of a prophecy. It was delivered with great emotion, and was received as the testimony of a dying pastor. From this time it became but too apparent that he was gradually sinking under the power of an insidious disease, and that nothing remained for him but to glorify his Master by patient endurance. He had himself a strong desire to live, but it was rather for the sake of his family, of the Church, and the cause of truth and righteousness, than for his own sake. As the indications of his approaching departure became decisive, his mind evidently stayed itself in perfect confidence on God. When the last moment came, he declared,—“It is all bright and clear.” On the 14th of May, 1851, as he was sitting in his chair, he breathed his last without a struggle. An Address was delivered at his Funeral by the Rev. Dr. William Adams, and a Sermon in reference to his death was subsequently preached by the Rev. Dr. Cox. Both were published.

The day before Dr. Mason's death, he expressed his regret that he had not selected a few of his sermons for publication, that thus he might still continue to preach to his people after he was gone. It was too late for him then even to make any suggestions on the subject; but a selection from his manuscript sermons was subsequently made, and published in 1853, in a volume entitled “A Pastor's Legacy,” to which is prefixed a biographical notice of Dr. Mason, by his friend the Rev. Dr. Adams.

The following Discourses of Dr. Mason were published during his life time:—A Sermon on Parental privilege and obligation, 1834. A Sermon entitled “A Rebuke to the worldly ambition of the present age,” 1836. A Sermon on the Subject and Spirit of the Ministry, preached before the Synod of New York, 1838. A New Year's Sermon, published in the *National Preacher*, 1845. A Sermon on Victory over Death occasioned by the death of John E. Hyde, 1845. A New Year's Sermon, published in the *National Preacher*, 1848. A Sermon entitled “An Evangelical Ministry the security of a nation,” preached before the American Home Missionary Society, 1848. A Sermon entitled “Signs of the times,” before the Foreign Missionary Society of New York and Brooklyn, 1850.

FROM THE REV. WILLIAM ADAMS, D. D.

NEW YORK, 4th September, 1854.

Rev. and dear Sir: You have requested me to communicate to you some of my personal recollections of the late Rev. Erskine Mason, D. D. In another form I have endeavoured to give a sketch of his life and character. I am greatly impressed with the imperfections of that Memoir. How difficult is it to embody in form that image of a friend, which lives in the heart! Art has invented no process by which that memory can be translated. The elements which compose our estimate of a friend's character are too delicate and subtle to be analyzed and separated by instruments so coarse as pen and pencil. It is impossible to convey to others, especially if they are strangers, a correct impression of a deceased man.

Dr. Mason, when I first saw him, was in the twenty-ninth year of his age. He was then the Pastor of the Bleeker Street Church in this city. I was greatly impressed with the manliness and dignity of his form. It was in the street that I received my introduction to him. I recall, at this distance of time, certain particulars of dress, manner, and speech, which convinced me, on a first interview, that he was serious without being sanctimonious, independent but not singular,—a vigorous man without a particle of affectation. This first impression was deepened and confirmed by an intimacy of nearly twenty years. As a man and a preacher, there was such a purity and simplicity to his character, that the eye took it in at a glance. It required no prolonged study to solve it, like an involved equation. He was a strong, substantial, honest man. So you would have judged, meeting him in private, or listening to him in the pulpit. There was no pretension, no varnish, no gilding, no attempt to appear more and greater than he was.

His style of preaching was rigorously intellectual. Some thought him inclined too much to metaphysical demonstration. The constitution of his mind made *proof* necessary to himself. It was his highest pleasure to acquaint others with the processes by which that conviction was attained. He had the highest ideas of the office of a Christian minister as a *teacher*. Numbering among his auditors some of the most distinguished jurists of the country, it was at once his delight and duty to show them the *reasons* of that faith which he preached. Demonstration with him was no affectation of skill and learning. It was honest, manly reasoning, by which he sought to commend the truth to every man's conscience in the sight of God. Greatly mistaken, however, are they who suppose that the processes of argument in which Dr. Mason was so strong, were dry and barren. The one quality which characterized his discourse was *religious pathos*. A masculine imagination gave a glow and warmth to all his appeals. His demonstrations were tremulous with emotion, and his proofs were with power, because they were so earnest and sincere. Dr. Mason was certainly a remarkable preacher. It was never my privilege to hear his gifted father. But the points of contrast and comparison, I should think, were very striking. The discourses of the son were written with the utmost care. Dependant little upon the excitements of occasions and circumstances, they lose none of their value and force, when transferred from the pulpit to the press.

Dignified, courteous, kind, I do not believe that Dr. Mason left an enemy. He was of that happy organization which excites admiration without jealousy, and was so considerate and just towards others, that all were pleased to acknowledge what was due to himself.

Seldom travelling abroad, he sedulously addicted himself to the labours of his own pulpit, and was the most prized by that congregation in whose service he expended the best part of his life. Those characters are of the best quality which are the most esteemed at home. Three years and more have elapsed since his decease, and many are there who will never cease to deplore his early death, in the very vigour of his manhood, as a great public bereavement.

Very respectfully,

Your friend and servant,

W. ADAMS.

FROM THE REV. JAMES W. McLANE, D. D.

BROOKLYN, June 20, 1857.

My dear Sir: I became personally acquainted with the Rev. Erskine Mason, D. D., in the autumn of the year 1836. He had then been for some six years the Pastor of the Bleeker Street Presbyterian Church. Circumstances, which need not be mentioned here, brought us frequently and familiarly together, and

I soon formed an attachment to him, which constantly grew stronger to the day of his death. His character was not rendered the less attractive by a near approach, nor was any man's esteem for him diminished by increasing familiarity. An increase of knowledge here was not followed by an increase of sorrow as it often is.

Objects, I know, when seen at a distance, seem different from what they do upon a closer inspection. The mountain range afar off looks smooth, unbroken by any chasms or irregularities; but when viewed from a nearer position, the perfect form disappears, and the irregularities become visible. Dr. Mason, like all other men, had his defects. But whatever they were, there was no gulf between the inner and outer man. He was found, upon close acquaintance, to be what at first he appeared to be. He had none of that mysterious outward air, or formal exterior, which had to be worn away by long and familiar intercourse, before you could find your way to his heart, and discover the high qualities which existed there. His heart was in his face—his meaning in his expressions. There was no guile in him.

In a great city, every pastor has his trials—his temptations. Among these, the influence of wealth is not the least. The minister of the Gospel is strongly tempted to discriminate according to the outward appearance, and to surround himself with those whom the world calls great. Dr. Mason exhibited no leaning in this direction—he was not drawn from his proper orbit by this disturbing influence. His course was regulated by the principle upon which Themistocles acted in the advice he gave his daughter in reference to marriage—he preferred the man without the money, to the money without the man. He drew around him men good and true—men of intellect and of heart; and in them he delighted. He did not affect notoriety, or seek, in one way or another, to keep himself before the public eye. He never advertised his own performances, or tried to attract hearers by novelty, either in his subjects or his modes of treating them. Far was he removed from that class described by Junius as the men whom the gentle breath of peace leaves upon the surface, unknown and unfelt, and whom nothing but the storm brings into notice. He loved peace. The quiet, unostentatious work of a devoted pastor was congenial with his feelings. He lived in the affections of his people.

Dr. Mason was a man of excellent judgment. To no one did his brethren in the ministry more generally resort for counsel, and seldom has any one had reason to regret having acted in accordance with his opinion. During the fifteen years of our intimate acquaintance, I had frequent opportunities of seeing the soundness of his judgment fully tested. During those years there were times of intense excitement and of great extravagance in theological opinion and ecclesiastical practice. But during all those conflicts of sentiment and feeling, Dr. Mason was always found the advocate for doing all things decently and in order. With him new things were not always true, and true things were as seldom new. He believed indeed in progress; but he did *not* believe that the true method of advancing was to forsake the old landmarks, or discard the demonstrated wisdom of other days, nor did he dream that all the treasures of wisdom had been discovered in his own age.

Dr. Mason was intimately connected with the origin and progress of the Union Theological Seminary in the city of New York. Among the nine persons,—four ministers and five laymen, who met at a private house in October, 1835, to consult in regard to establishing such an institution, he was one. From the beginning, his spirit was fully in sympathy with the movement. He was one of the original members of the Board of Directors of the Seminary; assisted in giving instruction; and I may add that the success which has attended this School of the Prophets is, in no small degree, owing to the wisdom of his counsels. When a new President of the institution was to be chosen in 1840, the

minds of the Board turned with entire unanimity upon Dr. Mason; and he would undoubtedly have been chosen, but that he would not allow his name to be put in nomination.

As a preacher, I may safely say that he had few equals. Others may have possessed more vigour of imagination, and greater powers of extemporaneous speaking; but for a firm grasp of truth, and the ability to conduct an argument with logical accuracy, and to throw the conclusion into the brightest sunlight—for what Cousin calls the mathematics of thought, he had scarcely any equals. Herein lay his great strength. Men listened to his argument as they would to a demonstration in Euclid, or to an analysis in Algebra, and were bound fast by it. His sermons were prepared with great care. He was not wont to bring other than beaten oil into the sanctuary. Even his weekly lectures were carefully prepared, and were usually delivered from a brief before him. In his preaching he dealt much with the conscience of his hearers. He made the law of God speak out. Men saw their obligations and felt their guilt, and were thus urged to seek a refuge in the Lord Jesus Christ.

The death of Dr. Mason threw a general air of sadness over the city. The feeling was universal that a great and good man had fallen in Israel, and fallen in the midst of his days. Though the grave has closed over him, and even the very sanctuary in which he ministered has disappeared, and men lay up the treasures of earth on the very spot where this faithful minister of the Gospel urged them to lay up the treasures of Heaven, it is grateful to reflect that his powerful ministrations,—his works of faith, and labours of love, are still silently, but certainly, accomplishing their end, in advancing the great interests of the Kingdom of Christ.

Very sincerely yours,

J. W. McLANE.

ICHABOD SMITH SPENCER, D. D.*

1826—1854.

ICHABOD SMITH SPENCER was a descendant, in the seventh generation, from Thomas Spencer, one of the first settlers of Hartford, Conn., who died in 1687. The son of this Thomas Spencer settled in Suffield, in the same State, where the family resided until about 1786, when Phineas Spencer, the father of the subject of this notice, removed to Rupert in the State of Vermont. Here he was born on the 23d of February, 1798,—the youngest but one of eleven children. He lost his father when he was seventeen, but his mother's death occurred only three years before his own. His father was a farmer in comfortable circumstances, able and willing, it would seem, to give this son, whose early intellectual developments were somewhat remarkable, a collegiate education; but, for some reason, he remained at home till after his father's death, enjoying only the advantages of a common school. His parents being neither of them professors of religion, though persons of exemplary moral habits, little attention was paid to his religious education, and his early years seem to have been an unbroken scene of thoughtlessness and gaiety.

* Memoir by Rev. J. M. Sherwood.—MS. from Mrs. Spencer.