

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.

VOLUME III.

NEW YORK:
ROBERT CARTER & BROTHERS
530 BROADWAY.
1858.

Entered according to Act of Congress, in the year 1856.

BY ROBERT CARTER & BROTHERS,

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

SAMUEL EUSEBIUS McCORKLE, D. D.*

1774—1811.

SAMUEL EUSEBIUS McCORKLE was born on the 23d of August, 1746, near Harris' Ferry, in Lancaster County, Pa. There he passed his earliest years; but when he was about nine, his parents, who were respectable and pious people, though in moderate worldly circumstances, removed with their family to North Carolina, and settled, some fifteen miles West of Salisbury, on lands which then belonged to the Earl of Granville. In this region he spent the rest of his life.

As his father had settled, with a pretty large family, in a part of the country where there was hardly a foot of land to cultivate, until the heavy growth of timber which covered it was removed, nor a shelter for man or beast, until it was erected, Samuel, with several brothers, most of whom were younger than himself, assisted his father in building the necessary tenements, and clearing and cultivating the farm. Samuel was also the instructor of the younger children of the family, and in a few years was employed as teacher of a public English school. At the age of about twenty, he commenced his classical studies. He was one of the first pupils in the school established by Dr. Caldwell, in Guilford County, in 1766 or 1767; and this was probably the beginning of his preparatory course.

He was graduated at the College of New Jersey, in the year 1772, in the same class with the Rev. Dr. McMillan of Western Pennsylvania, and Aaron Burr. He had made a profession of religion before entering College; but while there, he became satisfied, during a revival of religion, that his previous experience had been spurious, and then, as he believed, for the first time, really complied with the terms of the Gospel. He commenced the study of Theology, soon after he was graduated, under his maternal uncle, the Rev. Joseph Montgomery.† In the spring of 1774, he was licensed to preach the Gospel by the Presbytery of New York, and immediately after was appointed by the Synod to go Southward, and spend at least one year labouring in that region, under the direction of the Presbyteries of Hanover and Orange. After thus spending about two years in Virginia, during which time he seems to have become a member of the Hanover Presbytery, he accepted a call from the Congregation of Thyatira, in which his parents resided, and in which he had spent most of his early years. The Orange Presbytery, at a meeting in October, 1776, received him from the Presbytery of Hanover, and made arrangements for his ordination and installation in a fortnight from that time; though, owing to some unexpected occurrence, this arrangement did not take effect at the time specified, but was deferred until the 2d of August, 1777.

* MS. from Rev. Dr. Caruthers.—Foote's Sketches of N. C.

† JOSEPH MONTGOMERY was graduated at the College of New Jersey in 1755; was licensed to preach by the Presbytery of Philadelphia, between the meetings of Synod in 1759 and 1760; was ordained by the Presbytery of Lewes, between the meetings of Synod in 1761 and 1762; and became Pastor of the Congregations of Newcastle and Christiana Bridge, De. The Presbytery of Newcastle reported to the Synod, in 1785, "that, in consequence of Mr. Joseph Montgomery's having informed them that, through bodily indisposition, he was incapable of officiating in the ministry, and having also accepted an office under the civil authority, they have left his name out of their Records." His name appears on the list of members of Congress from Pennsylvania, from 1784 to 1788.

On the 2d of July, 1776, he was married to Margaret, daughter of William and Elizabeth Steele, of Salisbury, N. C.,—a lady of excellent character and highly respectable connections.

During the Revolutionary war, and especially from the summer of 1780, when the South became the theatre of conflict, the country was in a state of utter confusion, and vice of almost every kind prevailed to an alarming extent. The *civil* character of the war, too, gave it a peculiar ferocity, and produced a licentiousness of morals, of which there is scarcely a parallel at the present day. The municipal laws of the country could not be enforced, civil government was prostrated for a time, and society was virtually resolved into its original elements. Mr. McCorkle came out in reference to this state of things in his utmost strength. He preached, prayed, reasoned, and remonstrated—nor were his labours in vain. From the close of the Revolutionary war, and especially from the breaking out of the Revolution in France,—North Carolina, in common with other parts of the country, was overrun with French infidelity. Here again, he stood forth the indomitable champion of Christianity: he not only preached but published in defence of Divine Revelation; and infidelity quailed before him. It has been confidently asserted that more was done, in that part of the country, by his efforts, to arrest this tide of evil, which threatened at one time to sweep every thing before it, than by any or all other opposing influences.

About the year 1785, Mr. McCorkle commenced, in his own house, a classical school, to which he gave the name of *Zion-Parnassus*; but he discontinued it after ten or twelve years. He was a thorough scholar, and kept up his acquaintance, not only with the Latin and Greek Classics, but with Mathematics, Philosophy, and every important branch of learning. His salary being small, and not punctually paid, a school or some other source of income seemed necessary to the comfortable support of his family. But the drudgery of teaching, and the consumption of time and strength in the constant routine of mere preparatory studies, were foreign from the east of his mind, and incompatible with not only his fondness for theological investigation, but his sense of obligation as a Christian minister.

In the year 1792, Mr. McCorkle was honoured with the degree of Doctor of Divinity from Dickinson College, Carlisle.

In the far famed revival, that existed at the South and West, about the beginning of the present century, in which bodily agitations were so strangely mingled with spiritual exercises, Dr. McCorkle, for a while, bore an active part. At its commencement, and for some time after, he had no doubt of its genuineness, and he laboured with much zeal for its promotion; but as extravagances began to develop themselves, he felt himself bound to oppose them, and to do what he could to save the churches throughout the region from a fanatical spirit. His efforts in this way were in a good degree successful.

Within a few years after the commencement of the revival, his health failed, and it was evident that he was approaching the end of his course. By several successive and severe attacks of fever, and other complaints, he was nearly disabled for public service; and though he lingered for some time, it was in a state of great infirmity and suffering. But he was fully sustained by those great Christian truths which it had been the business of his life to dispense to others. He wrote, with his own hand, very minute

directions respecting his funeral, designating the minister whom he wished to preach his Funeral Sermon, the text which he desired him to use, (Job xix. 25,) the order of the funeral procession, and the hymns to be sung on the occasion; and he even wrote the epitaph for his own tomb-stone. He died on the 21st of January, 1811. His widow died not far from the year 1821. He had six children—five sons and one daughter, all of whom survived him.

The following is a list of his publications:—

A Sermon on Sacrifices, 1792. A Charity Sermon, delivered on several occasions, 1793. A National Thanksgiving Sermon, entitled “The comparative happiness and duty of the United States of America, contrasted with other nations, particularly the Israelites,” 1795. A Sermon preached at the laying of the corner-stone of the University of North Carolina. Four Discourses on the great first principles of Deism and Revelation contrasted, 1797. Three Discourses on the terms of Christian Communion. A National Fast Sermon entitled “The work of God for the French Republic; and then her reformation or ruin; or the novel and useful experiment of national Deism, to us and all mankind.” A Sermon entitled “The Angel’s seal, set upon God’s faithful servants, when hurtful winds are blowing in the Church militant.”

FROM THE REV. E. W. CARUTHERS, D. D.

GREENSBORO’, N. C., June 28, 1850.

My dear Sir: I was born within the limits of Dr. McCorkle’s Congregation, was baptized by him in my infancy, and spent several of my early years under his pastoral care. And, although he died when I was young, I have neither forgotten his appearance, nor ceased to admire his character. His tall and manly form, his grave and solemn countenance, his impressive and thrilling tones, are still distinct in my recollection. I speak of him, not when he was in his full vigour, but during the last three or four years of his life, when he was often so afflicted that he could not preach regularly; but his afflictions, and the conviction which he had of his approaching dissolution, may have increased the solemnity of his manner and style of preaching. Though cheerful and pleasant in the social circle, or at the family fireside, he never indulged in levity, or seemed to forget for a moment that he was a minister of Jesus Christ. From looking over his manuscripts, I judge that he always wrote his sermons, but he never used his notes in the pulpit.

In addition to the ordinary duties of preaching, family visiting and catechising, he was in the habit of giving out every year a series of written questions, and allowing the people two or three months to prepare their answers. The elders were located in different parts of the congregation, and each one had his portion of the vineyard assigned him. He had the names of all the families and individuals within certain limits, and over these he was to have a special care, and at his house the examinations were to be held. The adults were examined on the written questions, and the children and youth were heard on the Catechisms, Shorter and Larger. Such occasions were a means of great improvement, and often of serious and lasting impressions on the minds of the people. I recollect being at one of these examinations, and also at one or two of his pastoral visits to my father’s family. Though I was a mere child, I received impressions that have never been effaced; and I was made to feel, even then, the highest respect for the man. It has been remarked, and I believe justly, that the people of his charge were more thoroughly acquainted with the truths of Christianity, than those of almost any other congregation in that part of the country.

Dr. McCorkle was not made to be a missionary, even if he had lived at the present day, when the missionary spirit prevails so much more extensively than it did then. He was always ready to preach in destitute churches or regions, by direction of Presbytery, and often on his own appointment; but his delight was in his study, and thence emanated chiefly his usefulness. A minister's library is in general a good index to the cast of his mind and to his habits of study. If, on entering the study of a minister, with a small salary, and a large family to support, in this back country too, and in that period of its history when books were very expensive, and the difficulty of getting books from foreign countries was almost insurmountable,—you should find the shelves stocked with such authors in Theology, as Calvin, Turretin, Stackhouse, Stillingfleet, and Owen;—in Church History, as Hooker, Shuckford, Prideaux, and Mosheim (in Latin);—on Law and Civil government, as Puffendorff, Burlemaqui, Montesquien, and Blackstone; besides the Universal History, Encyclopedia Britannica, &c., it might be fairly inferred that he was a man who looked below the surface of things. Such was his library, and it was a good index to his mind and habits. He would not give a trifling book,—a mere novel or romance, a place on his shelves; but a work of real value that he wanted, he would spare no pains to procure. He rarely bought a work on experimental religion, if it were the production of a second or third rate man; but he delighted much in the practical works of such men as Owen, Edwards, and Doddridge.

As an evidence of the intensity with which he applied his mind to the investigation of truth, and especially to biblical research, it may be stated that not even the ordinary cares and interests of life were allowed to interfere with these favourite pursuits. If he had food and raiment, he seemed to be perfectly contented; and even the provision for that he left very much to others. His land was naturally fertile, and, with even tolerable culture, would have yielded an abundant supply for his family. He had also a number of servants,—the patrimony of his wife,—who, with moderate industry and good management, might have produced a surplus from his farm for market; but they were indolent and thievish, and he was indulgent to a fault. For several years, he employed overseers; but whether he was unfortunate in obtaining suitable persons for that business, or whether they could not make the negroes work, without such coercive measures as he would not sanction, does not now appear. The consequence, however, was, that almost every year there was a deficit; and he was obliged to buy at least a portion of his provisions. Under the pressure of necessity, he thought something must be done, and he concluded, in the spring, when the season for planting came, that, by taking a proper position on one side of the field, he could keep the servants at work, and attend to his studies, at the same time. The negroes, after ploughing across the field a few times until they found him so engaged that he did not notice them, stopped at the remote side of the field, and leaving their horses to graze, lay down and went to sleep. A neighbour, coming along, was surprised to find the negroes in such a predicament; but, at the other side of the field, on his way to the house, he found the Doctor in a corner of the fence, poring over a large volume, with several other folios, paper, inkstand, &c., by his side,—perfectly unmindful of his servants, and greatly surprised at being told that they were fast asleep at the other end of the row. That was the first and the last of his overseeing.

Dr. McCorkle had, on the whole, a very successful ministry. Many were hopefully converted through his instrumentality; and the general character of his congregation for intelligence and piety is a far better eulogium than any I could write, and a more enduring monument to his praise than the marble which covers his remains.

With best wishes, I remain,

Your friend and servant,

E. W. CARUTHERS.