



32101 067015949

McCOSH

JOHN WITHERSPOON
AND
HIS TIMES

RECAP

6156
cop.2

~~ANNEX LIB.~~
LIBRARY

OF

PRINCETON UNIVERSITY

Autograph of B. W. Cosh.

No. 350

JOHN WITHERSPOON

AND

HIS TIMES.

BY

JAMES M^COOSH, D.D., LL.D., LITT.D.,

EX-PRESIDENT OF PRINCETON COLLEGE.



PHILADELPHIA :
PRESBYTERIAN BOARD OF PUBLICATION
AND SABBATH-SCHOOL WORK,

No. 1334 CHESTNUT STREET.

To Professor Sibbey
from his friend
Sam McCosh

NOTE BY DR. McCOSH.

THE author is under obligations to Mr. Vinton, Librarian, and Professor Cameron of Princeton College, for aid in finding the works which relate to Witherspoon.

COPYRIGHT, 1890, BY
THE TRUSTEES OF THE
PRESBYTERIAN BOARD OF PUBLICATION
AND SABBATH-SCHOOL WORK.

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED.

WESTCOTT & THOMSON,
Stereotypers and Electrotypers, Philada.

Sibbey

PRELIMINARY STATEMENT.

THE corner-stone of the monument to John Witherspoon was laid in Fairmount Park, Philadelphia, Nov. 16, 1875, on which occasion an address was delivered by the Rev. William Adams, D. D., LL.D., of New York City. The statue was completed during the Centennial year (1876), mainly through the efforts of the Rev. W. P. Breed, D. D., chairman of the committee appointed for the purpose. It was unveiled with appropriate ceremonies and in the presence of a large and distinguished assemblage, Oct. 20, 1876, the Moderator of the Synod of Philadelphia, Dr. Breed, and the Moderator of the Synod of New Jersey, Rev. Thomas McCauley, presiding. An oration was delivered by Governor Bedle of New Jersey, and short addresses were made by a number of eminent ministers and laymen. A full account of the proceedings, compiled by Dr. Breed, was published by the Presbyterian Board of Publication, and may be had at the Depository. It contains in full the address of Dr. Adams delivered at the laying of the corner-stone, the oration of Governor Bedle, and also the address of the Rev. W. S. Plumer, D. D., LL.D., upon "The Life and Writings of Witherspoon," delivered on the following Sabbath evening in the West Spruce Street Church. It contains also a history of the monument read by the Rev. Henry C. McCook, D. D., and a description of

POE
6156
07

123078 cop. 2
(RECAP)

the statue by the Rev. William E. Schenck, D. D., members of the Centennial Committee. The proceedings were opened with prayer by Rev. G. W. Musgrave, D. D., LL.D., president of the Presbyterian Historical Society, and were closed with the benediction pronounced by Dr. McCosh, one of the successors of Witherspoon in the presidency of Princeton College.

The statue was then placed under the care of the Presbyterian Historical Society, which decided about two years ago to remove it to a more eligible site in the Park, and to make some modifications and improvements in the pedestal. This work was entrusted to a committee of which Dr. Breed, and after his death the Rev. R. D. Harper, D. D., was the chairman.

Upon the successful accomplishment of this effort the Presbyterian Historical Society resolved again to call public attention to the life and services of Witherspoon by some suitable public exercises. The Presbyterian Ministers' Association of Philadelphia united with the society in this purpose, and Dr. McCosh accepted an invitation to deliver an address before the association. This was delivered on Monday, December 16, 1889, the large assembly-room being crowded to its utmost capacity.

At the request of the Ministers' Association and of the Presbyterian Historical Society, Dr. McCosh has kindly furnished the manuscript of his address for publication.

JOHN WITHERSPOON AND HIS TIMES.

I.

THE life which burst forth like the spring at the time of the Reformation took three distinct types—the Episcopalian, the Puritan and the Presbyterian. Each of these has come down to the present time, and you may distinguish them in every city and in nearly every village.

Episcopacy retained as much as it possibly could, in consistency with Scripture, of the Roman Catholic Church, from which it seceded. It became the Established Church of England, it was kind to the poor, and it held up its head among the authorities of the land and claimed to be on a level with kings and nobles. Some of us think that it retained too much of mediævalism, and that there is within it a seed which is ever liable to spring up, in churches or individuals, in a return to some of the corruptions of the Church of Rome.

The Puritan was determined to bring everything, including what had been accepted in the Church for ages, to the test of Scripture. In following this rule he frequently came in collision with the Church of England, and had to leave it. He would accept no doctrine, he would practice no ceremonial, which did not seem to him to be enjoined in God's word. On this point his conscience must be clear. In pursuing

this course he was ready to submit to pains and penalties, to insults, and even to death itself. As Episcopacy was dominant in England, all he could do was to submit, protesting all the while against everything unscriptural.

The Presbyterian was equally determined not to accept anything which had not the sanction of God in his word. But in Scotland, Presbyterianism, through the influence of Knox, was established by law. It proclaimed that all members of the Church are priests, that all ministers of the word are on a footing of parity. It recognized as officers ministers and doctors, elders and deacons. It gave the congregation a power in the kirk Session, elected by and representing the people. It arranged ministers and elders into presbyteries, synods and a General Assembly. It held that the Church was one, and claimed for it a right to embrace the whole country.

Its genius was organization. It formed at an early date (1580) a National League to combine the people of Scotland. Then it formed a Solemn League and Covenant (1638), which was subscribed in Greyfriars' churchyard, Edinburgh, in blood drawn from the veins of the signers. It was a defence against prelacy, which the Stuarts were determined to impose on the country. Presbyterians now appeared as Covenanters.

II.

The Puritans and the Covenanters have often been confounded: English historians generally do not know the difference. Macaulay met with the Puritans in his father's house, and had a speculative admiration of them, especially of Bunyan. But he had no acquaintance with his Covenanting ancestors in Scotland. The same is true of nearly all the popular

English historians. Covenanters and Puritans agree in founding their whole creed and conduct on Scripture. They were equally distinguished for courage, and were ever ready to endure any kind of suffering—contumely, fines, imprisonment and death. But they differed. The Puritan, if his conscience was not interfered with, submitted, though not without protest. The Covenanter was not satisfied with this: he must extend, he must propagate, he must bring the whole of Scotland—he tried to bring even England—into the unity of the faith by the Solemn League and Covenant. He was not troubled with small scruples about meats and drinks, new moons and Jewish sabbaths. He proceeded on great principles, and was prepared not only to stand by them for himself, but to spread them everywhere.

There was no whining or whimpering among Presbyterians. If they had to bear trials, they held up their heads and bore them manfully. You may have read of the answer of the wife of John Brown, the Christian carrier, when Claverhouse shot her husband before her eyes, and then turned round and asked, "What think you of your husband now?" She answered, "I aye thocht muckle o' him, but never so muckle as noo." The ministers were brave, manly men, often the younger sons of the landed proprietors. Sir Walter Scott in *Old Mortality* describes the Covenanters as denouncing manly sports. Dr. McCrie knew better, and corrected him. He relates the story of a minister who on going round among his people came to a place where a popinjay, a national game, was being played. He walked in among them, carried off the prize triumphantly, and then went on amidst their cheers to continue his visitations. An ancestor of Thomas Guthrie, the great preacher—and, I may add, of my wife and

children—William Guthrie, author of a most admirable work still worthy of being read, *Saving Interest in Christ*, was appointed a minister over a rude people in Fenwick. On coming to his field of labor he found the men eagerly engaged in football. He joined them, showed greater skill than any of them, and at the close he said, "I have helped you; you must now help me;" and he invited them into the church, where he preached a sermon which moved and melted them, and ever afterward they were regular worshipers.

For twenty-eight years did these brave men oppose the chivalry of England on the mountains of the southwest of Scotland, where nearly every churchyard contains the graves of martyrs. An ancestor of mine was in the fight. He fought at Drumclog and Bothwell Brig, and when the English dragoons came down upon them, he had to hide in dens and caves of the earth on the banks of Stinchar Water. One day he ventured home to see his wife. But on looking from their house on the edge of a hill, they saw a company of troopers riding furiously toward them, under the command of the local persecutor, Sir Archibald Kennedy of Culzean. My ancestor had just time to hide among the raspberry-bushes when the dragoons came up cursing and swearing, and demanded of his wife to show them where he was. She faced them and told them that they might seek for him themselves. They said that they must have provender for their horses; she pointed to the stable and a haystack. While they were cutting the hay they observed the tempting raspberries, and started off to pluck them, and were just coming upon her husband. It was a crisis, but she was equal to it: she sought out a berry with a large white worm in it, and told them that the berries were full of such insects. They were disgusted at the sight

and turned back, and thus she saved her husband. I am descended from that woman, and if I have shown any good qualities, I believe I owe them to her. I am sure that it is my adherence to these principles of the spiritual independence of the Church which led me to give up my living—one of the most enviable in the Church of Scotland—when I did not know where I was to get another.

III.

Each of these bodies, Covenanter and Puritan, is distinguished by noble qualities; but these are different. The central difference is that the Presbyterians hold firmly by certain great principles, and have organized in Scotland, in Ulster, in Canada and the United States in order to defend and extend them. This can scarcely be said of the Puritans in England and in America. They have had no common fixed religious creed on which to rest as a foundation, and in polity they became Congregationalists, with a tendency to scatter, numbers becoming Unitarians in New England. The Scotch-Irish in the Middle States and the Southern States have fixed articles of belief, with a corresponding moral standard. They see certain great truths on the very surface of Scripture, and they trace these down to the farthest depths in God's nature and decrees. Being settled in the faith, they brush away small difficulties, and do not trouble us with fancies, conceits and Yankee notions.

It is different with the Yankees and with Congregationalists generally. Their belief has been somewhat scattered and tremulous, and has varied from age to age and among individuals. One summer I was traveling in New England; there happened to be a State teachers' meeting in Montpelier, and I was

asked to address the teachers. I went to the meeting, and was anxiously pondering what I might be able to say when a deacon came up to me, and said, "You are a metaphysician; let us have a short talk and determine the nature of predestination." I told him hurriedly that we might better be able to settle this question when he and I reached heaven. "But," said he, "what do you think of conditional immortality?" Fortunately, the previous speaker stopped at this moment, and I had to do my best to discourse on education. The same day, at a railway-station, I was accosted by a venerable man, asking, "Do you think that Emerson [lately deceased] will go to heaven?" At a public meeting not long afterward, Mrs. Julia Ward told us that she thought Emerson might be appointed the gatekeeper of heaven, and would be very charitable in admitting people. It may or may not be to their credit, but I was never so handled in New Jersey or Pennsylvania.

I may add that the Presbyterians have produced great theologians, great teachers, great statesmen, great orators and great philanthropists; but they have not sent forth any great poet or any literary man of the highest rank. It is true of America generally that it has not given us a poet of the highest order, like Homer or Dante, Shakespeare, Milton or Goethe. But Puritan England has produced one of the great literary works of the world in *Paradise Lost*; and the offshoots of Puritan New England have brought forth both poetry and history of a very high order.

The father, founder and proper representative of the Covenanting type of character was John Knox. English historians commonly call him a Puritan—by no means an apt expression. Milton designates him "the Reformer of a kingdom," and, as he said, so may

have felt a regret that he and his master Cromwell had not been able to do for England what the ruling mind of Knox had been able to do for Scotland. Knox may not have been so great a theologian or so great a writer as Luther or Calvin, but I am prepared to prove that by his organizing and decisive power he was a greater statesman, and has stamped a deeper and more permanent influence for good on his country, than either of the other two great Reformers. The Regent Morton pronounced his epitaph: "There lies one who never feared the face of man." He might have added, "nor the seductive face of woman." It has been proven that Knox, though a bold, was a tender-hearted, man. He felt keenly, as he tells us, in addressing his queen—as keenly as when rebuking his children—but was strong enough to resist the deepest feelings of his nature in offering resistance to one of whom he knew, what has since been demonstrated by documentary evidence, that she was an agent employed by Rome to destroy the Reformation. Froude the historian has shown that it was the firmness of Knox that saved for the time the Reformation, not only in Scotland, but in England.

John Witherspoon, it can be shown, was a descendant of Knox through his daughter, Mrs. Welsh, who, when King James agreed to let her husband come home to his own country from his exile in France, provided he gave up his defence of the independence of the Church, replied, "I would rather keep his head [cut off by the executioner] in my lap." Witherspoon had the spirit as well as the blood of Knox in him—"the blood wherein is the life." He was born at Yester, in Mid-Lothian, about eighteen miles from Edinburgh, and received his scholastic education at Haddington, where was one of the fine burgh-schools set up by Knox. His father was minister there. Both father and son are

described by Dr. Alexander Carlyle, the representative *Moderate* minister of his day, as accomplished, polished, courting the society of the great, but with no religious earnestness. The father is described, I fear with some justice, as considerably an animal man. Carlyle went to his manse to be examined by him before being licensed. "He had very few topics to examine on, as the depth of his reading was in the sermons of the French Calvinistic ministers, which he preached daily; was besides too lazy to engage in anything as arduous as the examination of a student—how to eat and drink and sleep being his sole care, though he was not without parts if the soul had not been buried under a mountain of flesh." It is clear that the noble qualities of the son came through the mother. Of the son Carlyle was obliged to speak more highly, though strongly prejudiced against him for the brave part which he acted. He said of him as a student that "he was a good scholar, far advanced for his age, and very sensible and shrewd." The addition requires to be taken *cum nota*: "but of a disagreeable temper, which was irritated by a flat voice and an awkward manner, which prevented his making an impression on his companions of either sex that was at all adequate to his ability. This defect when he was a lad stuck to him when he grew up to manhood, and so roused his envy and jealousy, and made him take a road to distinction very different from that of his more successful companions."* There is no evidence that John Witherspoon had a bad temper; he may have had naturally a keen temper, but he was able usually to restrain it. Nor was he guilty of *envy and jealousy* in the castigation he gave the faithless ministers of Scotland, and in the brave part he took in standing up for

* *Autobiography of Rev. Dr. Alexander Carlyle*, p. 26.

the independence of America ; but it was only in this way that the polished sycophant could account for the bold part he acted, and by which he rose to higher success than his companions, Blair, Home and Robertson.

He was educated at the University of Edinburgh (1736-43), where he was distinguished for his manliness. He was settled first in Beith, a quiet country place in Ayrshire, famous for cheese-making ; then in Paisley, a busy manufacturing town, noted for its shawls, but also for its piety, for there at that time might be heard morning and evening the sound of praise in family worship in almost every dwelling. He took an active part in church courts, and opposed the Moderate party, as they were crushing the evangelical faith and the liberty of the people to choose their pastors. The leader of the Moderate party was Principal Robertson, his former fellow-student, and many were the fights in management and debate between these two powerful men in the General Assembly, as to who should have the majority. It was thus that Witherspoon was prepared in that small but not unimportant country called Scotland (in that respect like Attica and Switzerland) for his work in the wider America. Meanwhile, Witherspoon was discouraged by the young ministers appointed under the Patronage Act increasing so rapidly that they gave the Moderate party a majority, when they became insolent, settled ministers against the will of the people, at times with the aid of a regiment of soldiers, often compelled the evangelical ministers to conduct the ordination against their will, and when they declined deposed them from the ministry. A body so independent and courageous as the early Church of Scotland was not likely to be a favorite with the reigning monarchs or with secular

statesmen. In order entirely to change the character of the Church and make it submissive, the Act of Patronage was passed in 1711, taking away from the heritors and elders of the parish the power of choosing ministers, and handing it over to patrons. The act was passed studiously and surreptitiously, and soon came to exercise a most baneful influence on the characters of the ministers. Young men sought the office because of its respectability and with no zeal for the conversion of souls. Witherspoon saw the evils multiplying and deepening, and his righteous soul was vexed from day to day. Lord Shaftesbury, with his moral sense and heathen morality, as expounded by the popular professor Hutcheson of Glasgow, became the idol of the young clergy, and was constantly quoted. The former had declared that "ridicule is the test of truth," and Witherspoon resolved to try how they would like a touch of their own weapon. He justified his appeal to irony to lash abounding iniquity by quoting what Elijah did when he mocked the priests of Baal on Mount Carmel: "Cry aloud, for he is a god; either he is talking or he is pursuing or he is on a journey, or peradventure he sleepeth and must be awaked." So in October, 1753, he published his *Ecclesiastical Characteristics on the Arcana of Church Policy, being an Humble Attempt to Open Up the Mystery of Moderation*. The book ran through five editions in a few years. It professes to teach ministers how to become *Moderates*, the name assumed by those not very zealous for religion in opposition to the *high-flyers*, who preached the old doctrine of sin and salvation.

You will be interested to hear some of the twelve solemn maxims which he enunciates:

A minister must endeavor to acquire as great a degree of politeness in his carriage and behavior, and

to catch as much of the air and manner of a fine gentleman, as possibly he can.

Good manners is undoubtedly the most excellent of all accomplishments.

Ministers used to be known by their demure look. Our truly accomplished clergy must put off so entirely everything that is peculiar to their profession that were you to see them on the street or spend an evening with them in a tavern, you would not once suspect them for men of that character, as a gentleman said in commendation of a minister that he had nothing at all of the clergyman about him.

A moderate man must endeavor as much as he handsomely can to put off any appearance of devotion, and avoid all unnecessary exercise of religious worship, whether public or private [that is, he is to have no prayer-meetings]. He must be at pains to avoid the great indecency of a grave and apparently serious carriage, or of introducing any religious subject into promiscuous company.

To be constantly whining and praying looks so orthodox-like that I cannot help conceiving a prejudice at it for this very reason, and I doubt not but every moderate man will have the same fellow-feeling.

In truth, a great abundance of devotion has such a tendency to inflame one with zeal that any man who would maintain his moderation had best keep out of the reach of such ensnaring influence.

A moderate man is quite at liberty to indulge in what his forefathers regarded as sin, but which have now been called by a hopeful youth *good-humored vices*.

They are only weak brethren who are filled with scruples. The weak man is restrained and confined by his narrow conscience, but the strong man believeth

he may eat, and by parity of reason drink, all things [there is wide license here].

Let it also be observed that good-humored vices are certainly social pleasures and show benevolence; and this is an affection for which our whole fraternity has the highest regard, insomuch that the very word has become the Shibboleth of our party.

When any man is charged with loose practices or tendencies to immoralities, he is to be screened and protected, especially if the faults be good-humored vices.

As to your belief, you must have an utter abhorrence of that vile hedge of destruction, the Confession of Faith—never to speak of it but with a sneer, to give sly hints that you do not thoroughly believe in it, and to make the term “orthodoxy” a term of contempt and reproach.

Your creed should be, “I believe that there is no ill in the universe, nor any such thing as virtue, absolutely considered; that those things vulgarly called sins are only errors in the judgment and foils to set off the beauty of Nature or patches to adorn her face; that the whole race of intelligent beings, even the devils themselves (if there are any), shall finally be happy, so that Judas Iscariot is by this time a glorified saint, and it is good for him that he hath been born.”

You must be very gentle in dealing with heretics, and speak of them as men of exalted genius.

You have to represent these high-flyers, so much liked by the people, as being either knaves or fools, according to the kind of people you address.

As to preaching, you should not dwell much on sin and repentance: these topics may be liked by the vulgar, for whose favor we do not care, but they are obnoxious to the upper classes, with whom the patronage of kirks lies and with whom we wish to associate.

You must, above all things, use refined and polite language, and not talk of grace, but of virtue—not of conviction of sin, but a sense of honor and beauty.

You must speak with Francis Hutcheson on morality, and enlarge upon its harmony, order, proportion, taste, and the nice balance of the affections. No matter whether the common people understand and relish it or not, these are dignified expressions and show scholarship.

In preaching in this way you probationers will not be popular, but we will force you into the parishes by soldiers with swords and guns, which will be conspicuous at your ordination. We will especially insist that you be inducted into your charges by high-flyers, and if they resist we will depose them.

It is thus we do all we can to make religion respectable, especially to the better classes. We never mention hell or damnation in the ears polite of my lords and ladies.

Our fathers wearied people by the length of their sermons; now we make them very short.

But here our monitor has to pause. He has to confess that it is sad to observe that the more we proceed in this commendable way, the less is religion attended to and the attendance at church becomes less and less; and now they are so impudent as to say the sermons are so short and empty that it is not worth while going to hear them.

It is worth while considering whether we might not profit by a Witherspoon Secundus to expose those who do not expound Scripture, who preach sensational rather than gospel sermons, treat of all other subjects rather than sin and redemption, and who seek to gather people by florid music.

V.

I am able to testify that there was truth in this picture. There was all along in the Church of Scotland a body of faithful men who fought against the evils. There were two bodies driven out from the Church—the Secession in 1733 and the Relief in 1852—who as dissenters kept alive a warm piety among a large body of the common people. I was brought up in the Church of Scotland when Evangelism was reviving and Moderatism was passing away. But enough of it was remaining to show me that Witherspoon's picture was a correct one. When a probationer I kept a good horse and rode among the parish ministers, arriving at the manse on Saturday night, preaching on Sunday and leaving on Monday, the minister on one occasion, I remember, telling his servant to boil two eggs for the breakfast of the young man, as he is about to travel to-day. They were commonly gentlemen, kind and hospitable, and pleasant social companions. Their pastoral cares did not sit heavily on them. They had no meetings for prayer in their parishes. In familiar intercourse they let me know that they had no faith in the Confession of Faith. They drank freely, and were occasionally overcome, and had at times to be conducted home by some of their people. Their conduct helped to produce those habits of drinking which for a century so injured the character of the Scottish people. I was acquainted with some of the ministers who flattered and spoiled Robert Burns when he was young, and encouraged him to write "Holy Willy's Prayer" and other satires against evangelical religion and against evangelical ministers. I also knew some of those devoted ministers who were satirized by him. It is a profound secret, and you must not speak of it,

but I had often, when a boy, to drink—sipping the cup to pass it by—with the men who had got drunk with Robert Burns.

It is pleasant to notice the eagerness of Witherspoon's patriotic spirit in an incident recorded of him when he was a minister at Beith. Prince Charles, in retreating before the king's forces, took a stand for a time at Falkirk. The minister rushed to the place, one account says, with some volunteers, but was captured by the Pretender's army and lodged in the prison at Doune, whence he and his company escaped by tying the bed-clothes into a rope and thus letting themselves down. Some think that this incident permanently affected his health.

It is a curious circumstance, not easily accounted for, that in the last three quarters of last century there were *hell-fire* clubs formed over the south-west of Scotland, in which the Sacraments and the most solemn services of religion were acted and exposed to ridicule. Perhaps they were the rebellion of the New-light Moderates against the stern discipline of the older Church. They had disappeared before I was born, but I met with persons who were members of them when young men. They had the effrontery to form such a club in the godly town of Paisley, and to mock the sacrament of the Supper the night before it was dispensed in Dr. Witherspoon's church. He was not the man to submit to this. In a fortnight after he preached a sermon on "Sinners Sitting in the Seat of the Scornful," and published it with the names of the persons supposed to be engaged in the profane act. A prosecution was immediately started against the doctor for defamation of character. The judge found the proof against the persons defective, and Witherspoon was subjected to a fine, which brought him

into pecuniary difficulties from which his friends had to deliver him. The publication of the names was, I think, a rash and unwarranted act. The minister of the gospel should have taken a different means of suppressing the evil. The Covenanter did not see that he was living in a new age.

In the middle of last century the question was keenly discussed in the Church of Scotland whether the Stage was to be allowed or encouraged. The Moderates thought that it should be, and that it could be improved, so as to become a school of morality. Unfortunately, it has never been made so, though there have been attempts to do this, and by its concomitants it has often been a school of vice. The agitation was stirred up by the acting of a play of the Rev. John Home, author of *The Tragedy of Douglas*, who had been a college companion of Witherspoon. The Moderates as a whole favored the stage, and on one occasion, when Mrs. Siddons was acting in Edinburgh, the Assembly could not get a meeting, so many of the ministers—I believe all the members of the Synod of Merse and Teviotdale—were at the theatre. The Evangelical party opposed theatre-going. Witherspoon could not be silent, and published a vigorous pamphlet, "A Serious Inquiry into the Nature and Effects of the Stage, being an attempt to show that contributing to the support of a public theatre is inconsistent with the character of a Christian."

When he was carrying on his struggle against Moderatism he had many supporters and received calls from several places, including one from Amsterdam in Holland. Meanwhile the people of America began to look toward him. In 1766 he was invited by the trustees to become president of Princeton College. This he declined, but not in such a way

as to prevent them from giving him a second call in 1768, which was pressed upon him by Richard Stockton, who, being in London on public business, went to Paisley to reason with him. The difficulty was to persuade Scotchmen that America was a more important country than their own Scotland. The aversion was particularly felt by Mrs. Witherspoon. But the doctor, possibly swayed to some extent by the enmity raised against him in Scotland by his bold deeds, was made to see the vast capability of the New World, and accepted the call. He arrived at Princeton, August, 1768, and was received with loud-sounding acclamations by the students and the public.

He took hold of his work at once with a firm hand. The college was poor, and he had great difficulty in finding proper teaching assistance. But he busied himself in procuring collections all over the country. For a large portion of his time he had to do the whole college work, with the assistance of two or three tutors. In the course of years a professor of mathematics and natural philosophy was appointed. The trustees invested him with the sole direction as to the methods of education to be pursued in the college. He introduced many of the methods of the Scottish universities which have done so much to raise a body of well-informed and thinking men. He paid great attention to the classics, and thus refined the somewhat rude taste of his pupils, many of them sons of immigrants. He introduced instruction by lectures: this, combined with the drill of good text-books, is the effective method of college teaching, as supplying at the same time solid knowledge and quickening stimulus. He delivered lectures on composition, taste and criticism, on moral philosophy, on chronology and history, and on divinity. His lectures have been pub-

lished in his works. They do not show much genius, originality or speculative ability, but they are distinguished by judgment, plain-speaking and faithfulness, and were admirably fitted to benefit the kind of students he had under him. He also introduced French and Hebrew, and when he could not find competent instructors he taught them himself.* He set great value on oratory, and established a system of public speaking, by which every student was required to speak before the college and such of the public as chose to attend. This is one of the peculiarities of Princeton College, distinguishing it not only from the Scottish universities, but from the European and all other American colleges. It has continued to this day, and has helped to send forth a great body of eloquent ministers, lawyers and members of Congress.

When he came to Princeton the philosophy of Berkeley had a place in the college. It was advocated by Mr. Meriam, a tutor, and at first favored by Mr. Stanhope Smith, afterward his son-in-law. The president set himself against this ideal system, and first reasoned against it and then ridiculed it till it disappeared from Princeton. He set up a very different school of philosophy. He claimed that he himself had anticipated Reid in propounding the doctrine of common sense, and had published his views in a magazine. He introduced this wholesome philosophy into Princeton, where it has ever since been taught—I hope with some improvements to make it more consistently realistic—down to the present day, and at this present time there are four hundred and fifty names on the rolls of the mental science classes—some of these are duplicates, but the total number is up-

* Dr. Ashbel Green's *Address before the Alumni of Princeton*, 1840.

ward of three hundred and fifty. With his numerous active duties he had not time to become an erudite scholar in philosophy, but he was acquainted with the British and Continental systems. He saw the evil consequences which would be drawn from the philosophy of Francis Hutcheson, the contemporary popular professor at Glasgow University, who represented conscience as a sense or sentiment and virtue as mere benevolence. His own moral philosophy was published posthumously, and had not been corrected by him. It seems to have been the loose notes of his lectures.

In several foot-notes to his lectures he refers to David Hume, who had been a student in Edinburgh only thirteen years before him, and who published his great skeptical work, *Treatise on Human Nature*, in 1739, when Witherspoon was at college. He always does so in a contemptuous manner. It is evident that he had no idea of the great talents of the skeptic, and of the power he was exercising in revolutionizing the whole of the prevailing philosophy and requiring it to build on a more secure foundation. The fight he had to engage in was of a very different character from that of contending with the subtleties of philosophy.

The number of students attending the college was commonly from fifty to a hundred, a large number, considering the unsettled state of the country. Mr. Adams, who visited Princeton, testifies that there was much study among the young men.

While he was carrying on his important and laborious work in Princeton the peaceful scene was broken in upon by the clash of arms, in which he had to take a very prominent part. He was at first very unwilling that America should be separated from the mother-country, which he dearly loved. But no attention

was paid by the English government to the grievances of the colonists. In June, 1775, he wrote an official letter strongly urging the people to submit to the English government.

VI.

But the tyranny of the government continued, and all attempts at a reconciliation failed. He had been trained in the doctrine of Knox, that sovereigns are to be obeyed as long as they confine themselves to their proper province, but no longer. He thought that the British government was going beyond its legitimate authority, and that he was called, in the providence of God, to resist it. He saw clearly that the colonies would never prosper so long as the British rule continued. Before the close of the year he took the decisive step, and proceeded with all his energy to rouse and organize the opposition to the English rule.

It was fitting that the Presbyterians should take a part in the great movement. I hear the ring of the Solemn League and Covenant in every sentence of the Mecklenburg Declaration. It tends to illustrate the remarks I have made at the opening of this paper as to the difference between Puritan and Covenanter, that while the first shot in the war was fired at Bunker Hill, the organization of the American Constitution (so much admired by Gladstone) was drawn out among the Covenanters in the Middle States, and Witherspoon had his full share in that Constitution, which is evidently moulded on Presbyterianism.

In July, 1775, he was taking an active part in a meeting of the freeholders of Somerset county, New Jersey, combining to oppose the "arbitrary and cruel measures of the British ministry." He was chosen a member of the Provincial Assembly of New Jersey,

and urged decisive and aggressive steps. He was appointed, with others, to depose the governor of the State, the illegitimate son of Benjamin Franklin. When the governor became insolent he addressed him in terrible language, referring rather coarsely to his birth. Shortly after he was elected a member of the Continental Congress, which sat in Philadelphia. Henceforth he was identified with all the business of the Congress for years. It was found, to the astonishment of the people, that this minister of religion, by a natural capacity and by his training in the church courts of Scotland and in Princeton College, had all the qualities of a high statesman. He took an active part in the debates, was consulted on many questions, and helped to settle them. All the while he was pushing on the Revolutionary movement. They were discussing whether things were ripe for action. "Ripe!" says he; "if you do not act they will soon be rotten."

He was impatient of delay in passing the Declaration of Independence, declaring that "he that will not respond to its accents and strain every nerve to carry into effect its provisions is unworthy of the name of freeman," and protesting for himself that "although these gray hairs must soon descend into the sepulchre, I would infinitely rather that they should descend thither by the hand of the public executioner than desert at this crisis the sacred cause of my country." He was one of the grand company of patriots who signed that Declaration of Independence.

As a political economist he took special charge of the currency of the country, seeking to prevent it from becoming exclusively a paper one. "He was a member of the secret committee of Congress whose labors were of supreme importance in the prosecution

of the war. In November, 1776, he was appointed on a committee with two others to visit General Washington and confer with him on the military crisis; and in December, when Congress had been driven from Philadelphia to Baltimore, he made one of a committee, the other members being Richard Henry Lee and John Adams, which issued a stirring appeal to the people. He was also a member of the Board of War, and in 1778 was made a member on the Committee on the Finances. In the following year he distinguished himself as a member of the committee to procure supplies for the famishing army. He also acted in that year on the committee to conduct negotiations with the people of Vermont, who were determined to organize a new State on the New Hampshire Grants. In 1779 he resigned his seat in Congress on account of the expense that was incident to the place, and with a desire to devote his attention to a revival in the college, but was persuaded to return in 1780. Many of the state papers on the emission of a paper currency, the mode of supplying the army by commission and other important subjects were from his pen, and some of the chief measures of Congress were initiated by him."*

VII.

In the midst of these bustling scenes Witherspoon, as he was a minister, resolved to appear everywhere as a minister. It is somewhat amusing to find that in college and in Congress, in which he was the only minister, he appeared with gown and bands, carrying a gold-headed cane, arrayed in a buzz-cocked hat and silver knee- and shoe-buckles.†

* *Appleton's Cyclopædia*, Art. "Witherspoon."

† *Mellick's Story of the Old Farm*, p. 442.

The college meanwhile was broken up, a few students receiving instruction from the president and instructors in private. The English soldiers occupied the college building, seized the cattle on the farm of the president and injured his property, till they were driven out by Washington. In 1779 he returned to his work as presiding officer of the college, but he does not seem to have resumed his active duties as a teacher. For two years before his death he was blind; he continued to prepare his sermons, to commit and deliver them. He died on Nov. 15, 1794, at his farm called Tusculum.

VIII.

It may be proper here to mention some of his special works. During all his presidency he conducted the worship in the town church, and the students attended the service. He carefully instructed all his students in religion, a practice which has continued in the college to our time. There was then no theological seminary in Princeton, and he instructed those intended for the ministry in theology.

In his preaching and his lecturing he was always carefully prepared. He usually wrote and committed even his speeches, and was ready to deliver them when the occasion arose. His style was always clear and forcible. His sermons may have been somewhat deficient in tenderness, but they give a masterly exposition of the subject, are arranged under heads and are always characterized by faithfulness. His treatises on Justification and on Regeneration long had a place among our popular religious works, and may be profitably read at this day. His works have been published in four volumes, which contain his sermons, lectures and many of his public discourses and papers.

Few teachers in the world's history have left behind them so many eminent pupils who engaged in great and noble work. The following is a summary of them, as given by Dr. Maclean in his *History of Princeton College*:

“Of the four hundred and sixty-nine graduates of the college during Dr. Witherspoon's presidency, one hundred and fourteen became ministers of the gospel; and of these ministers, nineteen became presidents or professors in different institutions in the States of New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia and Tennessee, thirteen of the nineteen being presidents of the colleges with which they were severally connected. Not less than twenty-seven others became men of note and able and successful pastors of churches in Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Connecticut, New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Maryland, Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia and the District of Columbia.

“Of the three hundred and fifty-five graduates not ministers of the gospel, a very large number became distinguished civilians, and not a few efficient officers in the United States army. One was for eight years President of the United States; one was for four years Vice-President; six were members of the Continental Congress; twenty were Senators of the United States; twenty-three were members of the United States House of Representatives; thirteen were governors of individual States,—viz. the States of Vermont, New York, New Jersey, Delaware, Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina and Georgia; three were judges of the Supreme Court of the United States; twenty or more were United States officers in the army of the Revolution; thirty others, at least, became dis-

tinguished, some for their culture of letters, some for their medical skill and knowledge, others for their legal attainments and as judges and attorneys-general, and others as active and useful citizens."

Witherspoon claimed that in his teaching he ever sought to go down to principles. The consequence was that he raised a body of pupils who were famous for their solidity of judgment. In particular, he helped to form the principles of his pupil, James Madison, usually regarded as the man of most philosophic mind engaged in framing the Constitution of the United States. Rives, the biographer of Madison, writes: "We have seen how liberal and expansive a field of inquiry was opened to the students by the additions which Witherspoon made to the previous curriculum of the college. The increased attention paid to the study, to the nature and constitution of the human mind, and the improvements which had been lately introduced into this fundamental part of knowledge by the philosophical inquiries of his own countrymen, constituted a marked and a most important feature of Dr. Witherspoon's reforms. Mr. Madison formed a taste for those inquiries which entered deeply, as we shall hereafter have occasion to remark, into the character and habits of his mind, and give to his political writings in after-life a profound and philosophical cast which distinguished them eminently and favorably from the productions of the ablest of his contemporaries."

One evening he explained to Ashbel Green and his fellow-tutors, whom he had invited to dine with him, the principles on which he acted in the government of the college. These principles are full of wisdom, tact and kindness. Without knowing them till afterward, I have endeavored to act on the same principles,

but more imperfectly. My work has been more difficult, as the number of pupils has been increased more than sixfold. "Govern," said he, "govern always, but beware of governing too much. Convince your pupils—for you may convince them—that you would rather gratify than thwart them—that you wish to see them happy, and desire to impose no restraints but such as their real advantage and the order and welfare of the college render indispensable. Put a wide difference between youthful follies and foibles and those acts which manifest a malignant spirit or intentional insubordination. Do not even notice the former, except it be by private advice. Overlook them entirely, unless they occur in such a public manner that it is known that you must have observed them. Be exceedingly careful not to commit your own authority or that of the college in any case that cannot be carried through with equity. But having pursued this system, then, in every instance in which there has been a manifest intention to offend or to resist your authority or that of the college make no compromise with it whatever; put it down absolutely and entirely; maintain the authority of the laws in their full extent and fear no consequences."

It has been my privilege to be a successor of many, most of them great men, who have occupied the position of president of Princeton College. In comparison with some of them I feel myself to be of small stature, but I can claim that as I received a great inheritance from my predecessors, I have aimed to hand it down without reproach and unimpaired to the generations following. I may be forgotten—that is a matter of no importance—but the work will go on and widen and deepen to the latest ages of time.