

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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District of New York.

Saturday night, prompted him to say to his son,—“The Lord will provide,” he found, on Monday morning, had been most signally honoured.

He took an active part in the organization of the Presbyterian Church after the Revolution, and was the first Stated Clerk of the General Assembly. He published an Account of his tour with Mr. Beatty, along the frontiers of Pennsylvania, and also a Thanksgiving Sermon for the Restoration of Peace, December 11, 1783. He received the degree of Doctor of Divinity from Yale College in 1785.

I am truly yours,

GEORGE DUFFIELD.

SAMSON OCCOM.*

1756—1792.

SAMSON OCCOM was an Indian of the Mohegan tribe, and was born at Mohegan, an Indian settlement on the river Thames, between Norwich and New London, in the year 1723. His parents, like the rest of the Indians, led a wandering life, and supported themselves chiefly by hunting and fishing. None of the tribe could read, and none had any better dwellings than wigwams. When Occom was a boy, the Rev. Mr. Jewett,† minister of the parish that is now Montville, was accustomed to preach to these Indians once a fortnight; and, after a while, a person went among them to teach them to read. During the great religious excitement that prevailed about the year 1740, the Indians were brought somewhat under a religious influence by the visits of some of the ministers in that region, and a number of them were induced to repair to the neighbouring churches. Occom, among others, became deeply impressed by the truth which he heard, and, after some six months of anxiety and distress, believed himself to have gained “the good hope through grace.” This change occurred in the year 1741, when he was in his eighteenth year.

From the time that his mind became enlightened, and his heart, as he hoped, renewed, he had a strong desire to become the teacher, especially the religious teacher, of his tribe. He applied himself diligently to learn to read, with such helps as he could command, and was soon able to read the Bible. In December, 1743, he obtained admission into the school kept by the Rev. Eleazar Wheelock of Lebanon; and he remained with him four years, evincing, during the whole time, the utmost docility and diligence. In 1748, he taught a school at New London; but soon left it, and was engaged in a school among the Indians, at Montauk, on Long Island, where he continued ten or eleven years. At first, he was there simply in the capacity of a teacher; and he devoted himself with great zeal and fidelity to the instruction of both children and adults; but having, after some time, received license to preach from the Windham (Conn.) Association, he joined to his office as teacher, that of preacher; and he preached not only to

* Buell's Ord. Sermon.—Dwight's Trav., II.—Mass. Hist. Coll. IV, V, IX, X.—Allen' Biog. Dict.—Doc. Hist. New York, IV.

† DAVID JEWETT was graduated at Harvard College in 1736; was ordained pastor of the church in Montville, Conn., October 3, 1739; and died June 6, 1783, aged sixty-nine.

the Indians at Montauk in their own language, but also to the Skenecock and Yenecock Indians, distant some thirty miles. A considerable number of the Indians at Montauk were hopefully converted under his ministry. In speaking of the results of his labours here, after six years, he says,—“Many of them” (the Indians) “can read, write and cypher well, but they are not so zealous in religion now, as they were some years ago.” His style of living, during his residence here, was well suited to the society with which he mingled. His house was covered with mats, and he changed his abode twice a year, that he might be near the planting ground in the summer, and the wood in the winter. As a means of obtaining his subsistence, he not only used his fish hook and gun freely, but bound old books for the people of East Hampton, stocked guns, made wooden spoons, cedar pails, and various other domestic utensils.

On the 30th of August, 1759, Mr. Occom was ordained by the Presbytery of Suffolk; and he retained his connection with the Presbyterian Church till the close of life.

In June, 1761, he went, under the direction of the Correspondents of the Society in Scotland for propagating Christian Knowledge, on a mission to the Onoyda (Oneida) Indians. The Correspondents, in a letter introducing him to Sir William Johnson,—after having set forth the importance of his mission, say—“We cannot doubt but that it will meet with your ready approbation, and therefore with the favour of your countenance and protection, and that you will be pleased to furnish Mr. Occom with such a pass, and such recommendations, as you shall judge proper to answer the great ends proposed.” How long his mission continued does not appear; but it would seem to have been for only a short time.

In the beginning of the year 1766, Mr. Occom, by request of Dr. Wheelock, accompanied the Rev. Nathaniel Whitaker, then of Norwich, Conn., to England, to procure funds for Moor’s Charity School. He was the first Indian preacher that ever appeared in Great Britain, and was of course an object of great curiosity and interest. The houses in which he preached were generally thronged with listening and gazing multitudes. He passed from England into Scotland; and from February 16, 1766, to July 22, 1767, he preached between three and four hundred sermons. He was eminently successful in regard to the object of his mission,—the amount of his collections in England and Scotland being upwards of ten thousand pounds sterling. The King himself subscribed two hundred pounds, and Lord Dartmouth fifty guineas. It seems, however, from the following extract of a letter which he wrote, after his return, that his object met with no great favour from the dignitaries of the Established Church; and the tone of the extract may help to illustrate his own character:—

“Now I am in my own country, I may freely inform you of what I honestly and soberly think of the Bishops, Lord Bishops, and Archbishops of England. In my view, they don’t look like Gospel Bishops or ministers of Christ. I can’t find them in the Bible. I think they a good deal resemble the Anti-christian Popes. I find the Gospel Bishops resemble, in some good measure, their good Master; and they follow Him in the example He has left them. They discover meekness and humility; are gentle and kind unto all men—ready to do good unto all—they are compassionate and merciful unto the miserable, and charitable to the poor. But I did not find the Bishops of England so. Upon my word, if I never spoke the truth

before, I do now. I waited on a number of Bishops, and represented to them the miserable and wretched situation of the poor Indians, who are perishing for lack of spiritual knowledge, and begged their assistance in evangelizing these poor heathen. But if you can believe me, they never gave us one single brass farthing. It seems to me that they are very indifferent whether the poor Indians go to Heaven or Hell. I can't help my thoughts; and I am apt to think they don't want the Indians to go to Heaven with them."

After his return to this country, he resided at Mohegan, though he was often employed in missionary labours among distant Indians. In 1786, he removed with a number of the New England Indians, and a few from Long Island, to what was called the Brotherton Tract, in Oneida County N. Y., in the neighbourhood of the Stockbridge Indians, who were of Mohegan descent, and had been under the instruction of Mr. Sergeant and Mr. Edwards. His last years he spent with the Indians, chiefly at New Stockbridge, near Brotherton, though he was engaged for some time in teaching a school at Tuscarora. In 1790, he was set off from the Presbytery of Suffolk, with others, to constitute the Presbytery of Albany. He died suddenly, July 14, 1792, in the sixty-ninth year of his age. For some time previous, he had had a presentiment that his death was near. Having been accustomed, in early life, to the manufacture of pails and cooper-ware, he returned to this employment in his old age, as his leisure and strength would permit. He remarked to his wife, one day, that he must finish an article that he had commenced, soon, or he might not live to do it. He went to his work, finished the article, and set out to return. His wife saw him approaching the house; but, on looking a few moments after, noticed that he had fallen; and, on going to him, found that he was dead. His funeral was attended by more than three hundred Indians; and a Sermon was preached on the occasion by the missionary, Rev. Samuel Kirkland.

Mr. Oecom, though generally exemplary in his deportment, occasionally yielded to excess in the use of intoxicating liquors. In one instance at least, this either drew upon him the discipline of the Church, or drew from him a voluntary confession; for, in a letter to the Presbytery of Suffolk, dated June 9, 1764, he says—"I have been shamefully overtaken with strong drink, by which I have greatly wounded the cause of God, blemished the pure religion of Jesus Christ, blackened my own character, and hurt my own soul." In his latter years, his life is said to have been entirely exemplary. His religious character was thought to have suffered for the time, at least in respect to humility, from the flattering attentions he received in England.

He published a Sermon at the execution of Moses Paul, an Indian, at New Haven, 1772. An account of the Montauk Indians, written by him, is preserved in the Collections of the Massachusetts Historical Society, vol. x. He occasionally tried his hand at poetry, and several of his Hymns are still extant.

The following testimony concerning him, is given by President Dwight, in his Travels—vol. II.:

"I heard Mr. Oecom twice. His discourses, though not proofs of superior talents, were decent, and his utterance in some degree eloquent. His character at times laboured under some imputations. Yet there are good reasons to believe that most, if not all, of them were unfounded; and there is satisfactory evidence that he was a man of piety. During several years, (the last of his life,) he lived within the bounds

of the Presbytery of Albany. By a respectable clergyman belonging to that Body, I have been informed that he was regularly received into their number; that he was esteemed by them a good man and a useful minister; that he was uncensurable in his life; and that he was lamented and honoured at his death."

About the time of his leaving Montauk, Dr. Buell, of East Hampton, wrote concerning him as follows:—

"As a preacher of the Gospel, he seems always to have in view the end of the ministry,—the glory of God and the salvation of men. His manner of expression, when he preaches to the Indians, is vastly more natural, free, clear and eloquent, quick and powerful, than when he preaches to others. He is the glory of the Indian nation."

FROM THE REV. DANIEL WALDO.

GEDDES, July 7, 1853.

Dear Sir: It is not much that I can tell you, from personal recollection, of the Rev. Samson Occom, though I distinctly remember to have heard him preach when I was about fourteen years of age. He preached, on one occasion, in an old meeting-house, in the part of Franklin, Conn., then known as Pettipaug; and, as it was only a few miles from my native place, I was attracted, in company with many others, by his reputation as an Indian preacher, to hear him. He made an impression on my youthful mind, which has remained in a good degree of vividness, through the long period of seventy-seven years,—an evidence that the impression must have originally been one of no inconsiderable strength.

Mr. Occom, at the time referred to, seemed to me to be a man between fifty and sixty years of age. He was of about the medium height, had rather a round face, and a bright intelligent expression, with a full share of the Indian look. There was nothing in his general manner, as far as I remember, to mark him as one of the sons of the forest; but his English education might naturally be expected to eradicate, in a great measure, his original Indian peculiarities. His voice was pleasant, but not very loud—sufficiently so, however, to accommodate any ordinary assemblage. His dress was entirely English. I do not remember his text, but I recollect that his subject led him to speak somewhat at length of what he called a traditionary religion; and he told an anecdote by way of illustration. An old Indian, he said, had a knife which he kept till he wore the blade out; and then his son took it and put a new blade to the handle, and kept it till he had worn the handle out; and this process went on till the knife had had half a dozen blades, and as many handles; but still it was all the time the same knife. I cannot be very particular as to the application he made of it, but the story I remember well, and it seemed to me at the time to be very pertinent to the object for which it was told.

His manner in the pulpit, as I remember it, was serious and manly; and he spoke without notes, and with a freedom which showed that he had a good command of his subject. He was undoubtedly a man of much more than ordinary talents, and though, for some time, a cloud rested over him, I believe those who had the best opportunity of judging, were disposed, on the whole, to think well of his Christian character.

Very truly yours,

DANIEL WALDO.