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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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FRANCIS S. SAMPSON, D. D.*

1839—1854.

FRANCIS S. SAMPSON was the son of Richard Sampson, a distinguished agriculturist in the neighbourhood of Dover Mills, in the County of Goochland, Va. He was born in November, 1814. At the age of sixteen, he was placed at the school and in the family of the Rev. Thornton Rogers,† of Albermarle, who was his maternal uncle. Up to this time, he had devoted himself, without much restraint, to youthful vanities and follies, and had indulged in a habit of profane swearing. But finding himself now in a religious atmosphere, his mind, by an almost imperceptible influence, gradually took on a serious tone, and for about twelve months he was in a state of deep religious concern; though, from the fear of ridicule, he studiously concealed his feelings, and sometimes struggled against them. In the spring of 1831, he chanced to hear a Sermon from the Rev. B. F. Stanton, then of Prince Edward, from the text—"Secret things belong unto the Lord thy God;" and the effect of it was to fill him with apprehension and distress, and induce a resolution to seek more earnestly the salvation of his soul. But the fear of reproach and the love of sin still continued to operate; and, on being sneeringly charged by one of his school-fellows, who had observed in him a change of deportment, with "getting pious,"—in order to vindicate himself from such a suspicion, he uttered a terrible oath. But no sooner had it passed from his lips, than his remorse became intolerable, and he was overwhelmed with anxiety lest he had committed the unpardonable sin. This was the immediate harbinger of the joy and peace in believing. He now cast himself, as he believed, upon his gracious Redeemer, and entered with full purpose of heart on the way to Heaven. His uncle, who, until this time, had not even suspected that he had any serious thoughts, but had deprecated the influence of his profaneness upon his own family, was equally surprised and delighted to be informed by a written communication from him, of the great change of which he hoped he had become the subject. It was to the influence of Mr. Rogers' daily example, more than any thing else, that young Sampson attributed his conversion.

He made a profession of religion, and became a member of the Presbyterian Church in Charlottesville, then in charge of the Rev. Francis Bōw-

* Memoir by Dr. Dabney.—MSS. from Mrs. Dr. J. H. Rice, and Rev. William S. White, D. D.

† THORNTON ROGERS was born of Presbyterian parents, in the County of Albermarle, Va., December 24, 1793. The first classical school he attended was conducted at Gordonsville, Va., by the celebrated Dr. James Waddel. He subsequently attended another classical school, of a very high order, taught near his father's, by a Mr. William Robertson; but he never entered College. He was made a ruling elder at an early age, under the ministrations of the late Rev. William J. Armstrong, D. D. His occasional addresses in private meetings were so pertinent and excellent as to lead some of his friends to suggest to him the idea of devoting himself to the ministry; and he finally yielded to the suggestion, and, after prosecuting his theological studies under many disadvantages, was licensed by the Hanover Presbytery, in 1829. He continued to reside on his small farm, and to preach to the people in the neighbourhood, who heard him with great pleasure and profit. In August, 1833, he was ordained at Gordonsville, in the same house of worship in which Wirt heard that incomparable effort from the "blind preacher." The little flock of which he now took the spiritual oversight, greatly loved him, and received much benefit from his ministrations. But he was not permitted to serve them long. Just one year after his ordination, he was attacked with a fever, of which he died September 1, 1834. He was an eminently devout and godly man, and his death-bed presented a wonderful illustration of the all-sustaining power of Christian faith.

man, on the 13th of August, 1831. On the 10th of September following, he entered the University of Virginia, and continued his studies there till July, 1836, taking a very extensive and thorough course, not only in the academic departments, but in the schools of Junior Law, Anatomy, and Physiology, and securing the degree of Master of Arts, which was then attained by very few. The influence of the University of Virginia was at that time wholly adverse to the culture of religious feeling; and yet, by his conscientiousness and decision on the one hand, and his courtesy and kindness on the other, he succeeded at once in exhibiting a fine example of the Christian graces, and in securing the respect and attachment of even those who had no sympathy with his religious convictions or feelings.

On the 9th of November, 1836, Mr. Sampson became a member of the Union Theological Seminary, Va. Here also his course was marked by great diligence and success in study, and by an eminently consistent and devoted Christian life. On the resignation of Professor Ballantine, in the spring of 1838, he was appointed teacher of Hebrew, and from that time continued to perform other duties of the Oriental department. He was licensed to preach by the East Hanover Presbytery, in October, 1839, and was ordained as an Evangelist, by the same Presbytery, in October, 1841.

Early in the spring of 1846, he suffered a severe attack of pleurisy, which was occasioned immediately by fatigue and exposure in preaching, but probably owed its more remote origin to excessive and protracted application to study. Though the disease for a time seemed likely to have a fatal issue, it was finally subdued; but his constitution received a shock from which it never recovered. In the summer of 1848, he crossed the ocean, and, after spending nearly a year in Europe, chiefly at the Universities of Halle and Berlin, in the prosecution of his Oriental studies, he returned in August, 1849. In October, 1848, he was elected Professor of Oriental literature and languages in the Seminary with which he had been connected; but he had for many years performed the work of a full Professor, though with the title and compensation of an assistant.

He received the degree of Doctor of Divinity from Hampden Sidney College in 1849.

Though Dr. Sampson, on his return from Europe, was so much invigorated in health as to relieve his friends, in a great measure, from anxiety in respect to him, he was soon attacked by a nervous fever, which left him with some threatening indications of pulmonary disease. But though his bodily system was evidently much disordered and enfeebled, he continued to perform his official duties; and for a few of the last months of his life, cheered on by the increasing prosperity of the Seminary, and the fresh tokens of favour it was receiving from the ministers and the churches, he seemed to address himself to his various duties with more than his former vigour and cheerfulness. When some of his friends ventured to expostulate with him for over-tasking his strength, he answered—"Perhaps I have but a few days or weeks more, in which to do my task. I must work the works of Him that sent me while it is day." These solemn and earnest sayings of his proved sadly prophetic.

On Sunday the 2d of April, 1854, he preached in the College Church, in the absence of the Pastor, and with a degree of power and fervour, which he had rarely, if ever, exhibited. After the services of the day, he retired to rest, apparently in his usual health—his last act having been to

administer to the comfort of a sick servant. Before the next morning, he was taken seriously ill, and his disease proved an insidious and fatal pneumonia. After a week of great suffering,—endured, however, with the utmost patience, and an entire confidence in the grace and faithfulness of God, he died on Sabbath afternoon, the 9th of April, in the fortieth year of his age. On Tuesday following, he was borne to the grave, in the Seminary burying-ground, by the hands of his pupils, and in the presence of an immense multitude, which seemed like one vast congregation of mourners.

Dr. Sampson was married in 1840, to Caroline, daughter of Russell Dudley, of Richmond, Va. They had six children,—four sons and two daughters.

In 1851, Dr. Sampson delivered, at the University of Virginia, a lecture on “the authority of the Sacred Canon, and the integrity of the Sacred Text,” which was afterwards published, in connection with the series of which it formed a part. In 1856, there was published, under the editorial supervision of his successor, Dr. Dabney, a Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews, which he had prepared, and which shows that he was no ordinary proficient in Biblical learning.

FROM THE REV. ROBERT L. DABNEY, D. D.,

PROFESSOR IN THE UNION THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY, VA.

UNION THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY, }
February 17, 1857. }

Rev. and dear Sir: My first acquaintance with Dr. Sampson was in the summer of 1837, when he was a Junior student in this Seminary, and I a youth attending the exercises of Hampden Sidney College hard by. The College enjoyed that summer a powerful revival, in which not only the Professors, but some of the students of the Seminary, laboured in concert with the officers of the former institution. Dr. Sampson then gave me, on one or two occasions, some Christian counsel of a very sober, judicious and affectionate character. At the close of one of these interviews in my room, as I had begun to exercise a trembling hope in Christ, he put in my hands the little tract of Dr. Ashbel Green, entitled “Questions and Counsel for young Converts,”—marking, as he did so, with his pencil, the sentence where the venerable author urges his readers to go over the questions weekly. This tract was of great use to me.

In 1844, I returned to this place as a student of Divinity. Dr. Sampson then held the post of assistant Professor, teaching the Hebrew language and exposition, the department of Biblical Introduction generally, and the Epistle to the Hebrews. I sat under his instruction throughout my whole course with great profit; and, in common with my comrades, visited him and his amiable wife in our seasons of recreation, and enjoyed much personal conversation with him. After I entered the active labours of the ministry, (in an adjoining Presbytery,) I met him occasionally at Synods, and always with pleasure.

In the spring of 1853, I was elected to the Professorship of Church History and Government in the Seminary. He immediately wrote, most cordially urging me to accept the post. This I ultimately concluded to do, and became his Colleague in August of that year. A large part of the summer vacation immediately preceding my entrance on my labours in Prince Edward, we spent together, at watering places, and at my house in Western Virginia. He at once received me as an equal to his intimacy, with an unaffected cordiality and simplicity which speedily effaced all remains of the feeling of pupilage, that was left

from my inferior relations to him a few years before. He was then full Professor of Oriental Literature. He had been greatly afflicted by feeble health, but was apparently recuperating, and was buoyed up by lively animal spirits, the most constant and delightful Christian joys, and bright hopes of the coming prosperity of his favourite institution. His studies had not led him at all into my department of instruction since his own licensure; but I received from him invaluable aid,—coming to my work, as I did, raw and unskilled. Although he had been, for fifteen years, wholly devoted, as it seemed, to his favourite studies, he was about as well informed in my department as you would expect to find the very best Divinity student on the day he presents himself for trial, with all the additional power and breadth of thought which he derived from his mature training. Thenceforward, until his death the next April, we were next-door neighbours, in constant and most familiar professional and social intercourse. We conferred together of all our interests, and all the subjects of inquiry which occupied our minds. Thus my acquaintance speedily grew into an affection, (which it is my pride to believe he reciprocated,) such that I have little hope I shall ever enjoy many like it, this side of Heaven. I may say indeed, in the graphic words which describe the friendship of Jonathan and David,—“My soul was knit with his soul.” And ever since his death, my heart has not ceased to respond to the wail of David for his friend,—“I am distressed for thee my brother—very pleasant hast thou been unto me; thy love to me was wonderful, passing the love of women.” I have enjoyed therefore the fullest opportunities for knowing him. My only disqualification for making a judicious estimate of his character is the partiality of my affection.

Dr. Sampson was in person light and graceful, and of a florid complexion. His personal habits, as to diet, sleep, and recreation, were simple, methodical and temperate, without being ascetic. His dress was scrupulously neat and appropriate, without the faintest approach to display. In his approaches to his fellow-men, there was the happiest union of unaffected modesty and graceful quietude with Christian dignity. Yet his was a dignity which repelled no advances of affection or confidence, nor any thing but impertinence. His friends who most desired to see him shine in society, as his solid worth entitled him, sometimes accounted him too modest. Yet, with a modesty which almost amounted to diffidence, he was the farthest of all men from a timid or truckling expression of his opinions. When an erroneous sentiment which he conceived to be of any importance, was thrust upon him in conversation, he most distinctly defended his own opinion, with a singular union of inflexible, even impracticable, mental honesty, and courteous deference. He was the last man in the world to be wheedled into the softening of a truth down, or the admission of a faint shade of the error he had been opposing, by any of the blandishments of politeness, or by the fear of seeming too pertinacious. Much of the singular amiability of his social character is no doubt to be attributed to the influence of grace. Had he grown up unconverted, he would have been known as a man of high and determined temper, of energetic will, and persevering activity. Divine grace softened what was violent, and refined what was valuable, in his temperament, until the result was a rare and lovely union of the strong and the sweet.

One of Dr. Sampson's most striking and valuable traits was his methodical industry. To any one who knows his ancestry, it is very plain that this quality was received from them, both by inheritance and inculcation. That whatever is worth doing is worth doing well; that each task must be done with one's might in just so much time as is needed to do it perfectly, and no more; that no task is to be left till all is perfected which can be done to advantage—these were the rules of working which he carried with him from the time of his boyhood to the school, the University, the study, the lecture-room. The same thoroughness, the same deep ploughing, the same complete harrowing, the same utter extirpation

of obstructions, the same perfect finish which characterized the farm of his father, prevailed in his scholarship and instructions.

One of the most prominent traits of Dr. Sampson's Christian character was the uniformity and healthfulness of his devotional spirit. While his private habits in this matter were covered with a sacred veil, which none dared to attempt to lift,—drawn alike by the reverence and the modesty of his spirit,—his profiting was so outwardly evident to all, that no one could doubt his diligence in the closet. While his brief diary laments occasional spiritual declensions, there is reason to believe that he never knew what it was to lose the assurance of hope; and that the flame of devotion burned in him with a glow unusually steady. In public, his prayers were eminently edifying to believers, marked by scriptural tone, humble sincerity, appropriateness and comprehensiveness. But to know the sweetness of his spirit of prayer fully, one must have enjoyed the privilege of being an inmate of his house, and frequenting his domestic altar. Family prayers were, in his house, no hurried, unmeaning form. The whole air and tone of the exercise showed deep sincerity and earnestness. After a daily catechising of children and servants, the reading of the Word of God, and a hymn of praise, he bowed his knees with a composed awe and seriousness, which seemed to communicate itself to all the circle. What deep sincerity, what discrimination and justice, what point, what fulness, what grave tenderness, characterized those prayers, as he brought before the throne of grace his household—his children, his servants, his relatives, his brethren in Christ, the Seminary, the Church, and the whole interests of a perishing world!

Dr. Sampson was eminently conscientious in every thing, and in nothing more than in the use of property. Whether his circumstances were scanty or affluent, he was simple in his tastes, unostentatious in his person, and economical from principle. In accordance with the general system of all his habits, he kept an exact account of all expenditures—a thing which is, indeed, a necessary foundation for the proper practice both of Christian liberality and Christian economy. He was economical only in order to have the means to be liberal. His Christian hospitality was overflowing; and it was truly the hospitality of a Christian minister, designed not for its own display, but for the bestowal of comfort on others. To every cause he gave, always with the heart, and when his means became ample, with the hand, of a prince. It was one of the secrets which his Christian modesty never revealed, that he kept a strict account between himself and God, in which all sources of income were stated with scrupulous exactness, and a fixed and liberal portion of the same was set apart to alms-giving; and this account was balanced with as much regularity as his bank-book. Meanwhile, he was not without the pretext, which many professors of religion find, for stinting their liberality, in the claims of a growing family.

I must say something of Dr. Sampson as an instructor; for in his practical skill in this department was, I think, his peculiar value to the Church in our day. I hesitate not to say that, as a master of the art of communicating knowledge, he was, in my view, unrivalled. It was not that his lectures presented those grand sayings which electrify for the moment, nor that any one of his efforts produced on the pupil an impress of pre-eminent talent,—but there was just the combination of that justness of mind, steady animation, thorough knowledge, patience and tact, which give the highest skill in teaching, both as it is a trade and as it is a science. He was equal to its profoundest researches. He shunned none of its most irksome drudgeries. One of the foundation stones of his success was his own indisputable scholarship. No man ever passed through one of his classes, without a profound and admiring conviction of this. Another was in his unflinching animation and vivacity of mind, which was so keen, even on subjects usually esteemed dry, as to seem unaccountable to many. The exertion of voice and body which he unconsciously employed, when thoroughly warmed to

his work, was often the subject of playful remark between him and his colleagues. This animation communicated itself to his pupils,—so that usually their highest diligence was exerted in his department, though it was one not most attractive to all minds. But to this result, another quality, which is invaluable to the teacher, also contributed. This was the energy of his own will, which pressed on towards the objects of his exertion with an impetus which swept all along with it and communicated its own life to the most sluggish. In every act of his in the class room, there was expressed the idea of *work*; and all who frequented it soon felt instinctively that it was not the place for loitering. It might be said that his watchword was *thoroughness*. With an admirable patience he expounded his subject so as to make it luminous to the weakest eye; and if his questions revealed the fact that there was still some one who did not fully comprehend, he would resume his explanation, and repeat in varied forms, till his ideas were thoroughly mastered. Out of this habit, and the propensity of his mind to thorough work, probably grew that which might have been considered his prominent fault as an instructor. His explanations sometimes degenerated into excessive amplification, which became wearisome to those who had given him a moderate degree of attention from the beginning; and he thus unduly protracted his prelections.

His intercourse with his pupils was marked by a happy union of modest dignity, which repelled improper encroachments, and cordial, ingenuous kindness, which conciliated confidence. In his presence, each one felt that there was a simplicity and candour which set the stamp of reality on every kind attention. It is believed that there is not one of his pupils who did not feel for him not only respect, but warm affection; and many can join in the sad words of one who remarked, when speaking of his death,—“Well I never expect to meet with another minister of the Gospel whom I shall love and revere as I did that man.” Often it was a subject of wonder to his colleagues how so much affection could be retained from those towards whom he exercised so much fidelity in admonishing.

The distinctive traits of his expository instructions may perhaps be described as justice of thought, neatness, and impartiality of mind. He believed the plenary inspiration of the Scriptures. His soul loved their spiritual truths; and often in the lecture-room he soared away from the dry dissection of words and propositions into regions of devout meditation, and made his class forget for the time the exercises of the head, in the nobler exercises of the heart.

Dr. Sampson's preaching exhibited always the lucid order, and the animation of mind, which marked every thing that he produced. His best sermons rose to a grade of excellence which is seldom displayed in any part of the Church. And it was an excellence which was most appreciated by the most cultivated and mature minds. Whilst there were other preachers who would be more sought after by the masses, he was preferred by the men of thought and acquirement. His plans of discussion were marked by a just and comprehensive view, which showed both the profound Theologian, and the ripe Biblical scholar, who had drunk deep into the spirit of the Word of God. His propositions were usually stated with singular accuracy and beauty of language; but it was a beauty rather logical than theoretical, rather chaste than florid. Indeed his whole method of discussion wore an appearance of directness too severe to admit of any license or ornament. Yet in the judgment of all those who are capable of appreciating a felicitous purity and aptness of language, and thoughts of vigorous symmetry, many passages in his sermons rose to the highest grade of eloquence, coupled, as they were, with his genuine fervour and fire. His preaching was rich in matter, and eminently scriptural, such as is best fitted to feed the spiritual mind. It was always remarkable for its elegance and elevation, which were never tarnished by any thing coarse in allusion, ludicrous in association, or

bungling in structure. But it was, the least of all men's, a finical elegance. It was rather that of an energetic and lofty simplicity. That men of strictly scholastic training and pursuits, should excel in the particular work of the pulpit, is rather the exception; but he was certainly one of the most brilliant of these exceptions. By the intelligent public his preaching was even as highly esteemed, as his professional labours were by intelligent students.

Dr. Sampson could not be called a genius. He was what is far better,—a man of high talent. His mind presented nothing that was salient or astonishing. But this was not so much because there was not power, as because it was power symmetrically developed. His was just one of those excellent minds, which grow most and largest by good cultivation. In wide and adventurous range, his speculative powers were not equal to those of some other men; but in power of correct analysis, in soundness of judgment and logical perspicuity, he was superior to all I have ever known except a very few. Indeed when a speculative subject was fully spread out before his mind for consideration, his conclusions seemed to be guided by a penetration and justness of thought almost infallible. This consideration was deliberate, and his decision was very rarely expressed with haste, or even with promptitude. Hence his writings and conversation never exhibited any of that paradox, or that bold novelty and dangerous originality, which are too often mistaken for greatness. His talents, if they had less to awaken an empty astonishment and admiration, were far safer, more reliable and more useful. It was hard for any thing sophistical or unsatisfactory to escape detection under his steady gaze. He was particularly free from that common fault of many minds of large grasp,—the adopting of *major* propositions so large that they will contain the conclusion which the reasoner desires to derive from them; but at the same time so shadowy, that they contain he knows not how much more.

In his powers of arrangement he was undoubtedly superior to any man I have ever known. In his mind the elements of thought seemed to group themselves always, and spontaneously, into the most philosophical order possible, with a regularity like that of the atoms of limpid water, when they crystalize into transparent ice.

The efforts of Dr. Sampson's imagination were rather of that kind which Mr. Macaulay describes in Sir James Mackintosh. They consisted not so much in the original grouping of elements into new, but life-like, forms, as in selecting appropriate forms already shaped out, from the stores of a well furnished memory. In those severer exercises of imagination, which are required in mathematical thought, and in the bodying forth of scientific conceptions, this faculty was eminently distinct and vigorous. But in its more poetic exercises it was limited. His power of calling up that species of illustration which is flowing and graceful, was scanty; and while the operations of his faculties, especially in lecturing and preaching, were unusually fervent, it was rather, so far as it was not spiritual, the dry heat, if I may so term it, of intellectual animation, than the glow of genial fancies. And yet there were a few occasions on which he showed a high measure of the graphic or pictorial power; which might indicate that this faculty was rather disused by him than lacking in him. Another of his mental peculiarities has been already hinted—his almost impracticable honesty. He could never be induced to accept a proposition, unless it wholly commended itself to his mind as true. His memory was most retentive, for all things which were arranged in it by any logical association; but for things sole, or merely verbal, it was sometimes treacherous.

Upon the whole, considering the admirable justness and perspicuity of his mind, its vigour and accuracy in analysis, its wonderful capacity for philosophical arrangement, and the energy of its purposes, he might have been truthfully called a man of great powers. The symmetry of those powers, his modesty in

their display, the very accuracy of thought which expressed all those paradoxical brilliances that catch the admiration of the crowd, forbid that he should be promptly appreciated. Hence his proper grade will probably only be assigned him by those who, like myself, had opportunities to contemplate his mental powers deliberately. But it is my sober judgment,—a judgment formed maturely, in advance of that warm personal attachment which I shall ever esteem one of the chief blessings and honours of my life, that Dr. Sampson, for his particular work, possessed capacities unsurpassed by any man which our country has produced, and equalled by very few.

With Christian regards,

Sincerely yours,

ROBERT L. DABNEY

WILLIAM COWPER SCOTT.*

1840—1854.

WILLIAM COWPER SCOTT, the eldest son of the Rev. William N. Scott, and a grandson of the Rev. Archibald Scott, successively ministers of the Presbyterian Church in Virginia, was born in Martinsburg, Berkeley County, Va., on the 13th of January, 1817. His mother, whose maiden name was *Nancy Daniel*, was a native of Charlotte County, in the same State. When he was four years old, his parents moved to Hardy County, where his father entered upon a wide and laborious missionary field, in which he spent a long and useful ministerial life. He gathered, as the fruits of his ministry there, three Presbyterian Churches, and still (1856) lives and labours among a people whom he has served thirty four years.† The scenery of this county is strikingly bold and beautiful. Mountains of towering height and startling abruptness are separated by valleys of almost enchanting beauty. The population of this region, having long been shut up in their valleys, constitute a society peculiar indeed, but distinguished for rural plainness and great moral worth. It was here, amid such scenes, and under the eye of pious and judicious parents, that William C. Scott spent the most impressible period of his life.

He was conducted through his academic course, principally by his father, who, to support his family and educate his own children, had opened a school, which he continued, with occasional brief intervals, for twenty

* MS. from his brother, Rev. John A. Scott.

† Since this sketch was written, the venerable man here referred to has deceased. He was born in Augusta County, Va., March 4, 1789; was successively under the instruction of the Rev. Samuel Brown and the Rev. William Calhoun, and was ultimately associated as Tutor with the latter. He completed his classical course at Washington College about the year 1810. He studied Theology under the direction of the Rev. Dr. Moses Hoge, and after his licensure by the Lexington Presbytery, engaged somewhat extensively in missionary service in his native State. Soon after his marriage in 1814, he took up his residence in Berkeley County, where he opened a Female Academy. Here he continued teaching with great success, and supplying vacant churches on the Sabbath, till 1822. In 1818, he was ordained by the Presbytery of Winchester as an Evangelist. In the spring of 1822, he removed his family to Luney's Creek, in Hardy County, where he spent the rest of his life. About two years before his death, he withdrew, on account of bodily infirmity, from the pastoral charge of the churches he had gathered. He died on the 24th of January, 1857, in his sixty-eighth year. He was distinguished for solid and well-directed powers, for earnest, active piety, and an eminently useful life.