

ANNALS

OF THE

AMERICAN PULPIT;

OR

COMMEMORATIVE NOTICES

OF

DISTINGUISHED AMERICAN CLERGYMEN

OF

VARIOUS DENOMINATIONS,

FROM THE EARLY SETTLEMENT OF THE COUNTRY TO THE CLOSE OF THE YEAR  
EIGHTEEN HUNDRED AND FIFTY-FIVE.

WITH HISTORICAL INTRODUCTIONS.

BY WILLIAM B. SPRAGUE, D. D.

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VOLUME III.

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BY ROBERT CARTER & BROTHERS,

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

In his diary he has detailed many interesting facts in connection with these periods, which show that a rich blessing attended his labours.

Mr. Prime published A Discourse on the nature of Ordination, delivered immediately previous to the ordination of Mr. Benjamin Tallmadge.\*

It would be easy to extend this notice of my venerable ancestor, but as I suppose that I have written enough for your purpose, I will only add that

I am very sincerely yours,

S. I. PRIME.

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## GILBERT TENNENT.†

1725—1764.

GILBERT TENNENT, the eldest son of the Rev. William Tennent, Senior, was born in the County of Armagh, Ireland, February 5, 1703. He was about fourteen years old, when his father migrated to America. He received his education under the paternal roof, and afterwards assisted his father in conducting the education of others. The honorary degree of Master of Arts was conferred upon him by Yale College in 1725. His first permanent religious impressions were received in his fifteenth year, through the exertions of his father, on his passage across the Atlantic; but it was several years before he gained comfortable evidence of being spiritually renewed. In this interval, he pursued a course of theological reading, and subsequently devoted a year to the study of medicine, under an apprehension that his spiritual state would not justify his entering the ministry. But, about 1724 or 1725, his experience became more decided and satisfactory, so that he had no longer any doubt that he was called to preach the Gospel; and, in due time, he presented himself as a candidate to the Presbytery of Philadelphia, of which his father was a member. In his trials before the Presbytery, he appeared to uncommon advantage, and was licensed to preach in May, 1725. Shortly after his licensure, he preached for some time at Newcastle, De., and received a call to settle there; but he took his leave so abruptly as to excite no small displeasure among the people. The congregation and the Presbytery of Newcastle complained to the Synod on the subject, and a letter was produced declaring his acceptance of the call. The Synod decided that his conduct was too hasty, and the Moderator reproved him, and exhorted him to greater caution in future. He is said to have received the rebuke with great meekness. He was ordained at New Brunswick, by the Philadelphia Presbytery, in the autumn of 1726. He would have been called, shortly after, to Norwalk, Conn., had not the Fairfield Association interposed their judgment that he ought not to be taken from "so destitute a region as the Jerseys." From the

\* BENJAMIN TALLMADGE was born in New Haven, Conn., January 1, 1725; was graduated at Yale College in 1747; was ordained and installed pastor of the church in Brookhaven, L. I., October 23, 1754; was dismissed June 15, 1785; and died February 5, 1786, aged sixty-one years. He was a fine scholar and an able divine. He was the father of the late Colonel Benjamin Tallmadge, of Revolutionary fame.

† Dr. Finley's Sermon on his death.—Gillies' Hist. Coll.—Assemb. Miss. Mag. I.—Hist. Log Coll.—Webster's MSS.

commencement of his ministry, his preaching excited great attention; and his popular and commanding powers were acknowledged, even by those who disrelished the doctrines he preached, or thought him chargeable with undue severity.

When he settled at New Brunswick, he found there several very godly persons, who had been brought into the church under the ministry of the Rev. Theodore Jacobus Frelinghuysen,—one of the most eminent ministers of the Reformed Dutch Church; and that excellent man sent him a letter on “the necessity of rightly dividing the word,” which made a powerful impression on his mind, and greatly quickened his zeal in his Master’s cause. During the first year and a half after his settlement, though he was much admired as an able and impressive preacher, there seems to have been little visible fruit from his labours. A severe illness, which occurred about the close of that period, brought him into the attitude of deep humiliation in view of his want of success, and, from that time, he became far more earnest and pungent in his preaching, and had the pleasure soon to witness a corresponding change in the state of his congregation.

In 1738, he laid before the Synod “sundry large letters,” which had passed between him and the Rev. David Cowell of Trenton, in regard to the true motive that should influence our obedience to God;—whether it should be wholly a desire for his glory, or whether there should also be a desire for our own happiness;—in other words, whether disinterested benevolence is the essence of holiness. The large committee, to whom the papers were referred, heard both parties, and delayed their decision for a year. The result to which they came, did not satisfy Tennent; and he again introduced the matter in 1740, but the Synod, by a large majority, refused to consider it. This he represented, in a paper which he read a few days after, on the deplorable state of the ministry, as sanctioning the doctrine that there is no difference between seeking the glory of God and our own happiness, and that self-love is the foundation of all obedience.

In the year 1740, he was prevailed on by Whitefield to accompany him on a “preaching tour” to Boston; and this tour undoubtedly constituted one of the great events of his life. With a fixedness of purpose which was proof against all obstacles, he set off, in the winter season, to visit a part of the country where he was an entire stranger, and where he knew his ministrations must prove to many exceedingly unwelcome. He reached Boston on the 13th of December, and continued there for nearly three months, preaching almost every day with great power, and producing of course a divided public opinion corresponding to that which already existed in respect to the labours of Whitefield. The effect of his preaching in Boston is thus described by the Rev. Mr. Prince, minister of the Old South Church, and the well known author of the *Christian History*:—

“It was both terrible and searching. It was for matter justly terrible, as he, according to the inspired oracles, exhibited the dreadful holiness, justice, law-threatenings, truth, power and majesty of God, and his anger with rebellious, impenitent and Christless sinners; the awful danger they were in every moment of being struck down to hell, and damned forever, with the amazing miseries of that place of torment. By his arousing and spiritual preaching, deep and pungent convictions were wrought in the minds of many hundreds of persons in that town; and the same effect was produced in several scores, in the neighbouring congregations. And now was such a time as we never knew. The Rev. Mr. Cooper was wont to say that more came to him in one week in deep concern, than in the whole twenty-four years of his preceding ministry. I can say also the same as to the numbers who repaired to me.”

It appears from a letter which Mr. Tennent addressed to Whitefield, preserved in Gillies' Historical Collections, that a similar effect attended his preaching during his whole tour; and that, not only in the region of Boston, but at New Haven and Milford in Connecticut as well as on Long Island, there were multitudes addressing themselves with the utmost anxiety and earnestness to the work of their salvation.

Mr. Tennent had much to do in bringing about the division of the Presbyterian Church, in 1741: indeed it was owing, in a great measure, to his indiscreet and impetuous course, and especially to one sermon called the "Nottingham Sermon," which Dr. Alexander declares to be "one of the most severely abusive sermons that was ever penned," that that schism occurred. Being naturally a man of strong feelings, and fully convinced that a large portion of the ministers of the Presbyterian Church were opposed to the revival of which he was so zealous a promoter, he took it upon himself to denounce them in terms of most unsparing reprobation; and his conduct, viewed at this distance, though dictated no doubt by an honest regard to the cause of Christ, cannot be regarded otherwise than deeply reprehensible. It is to his honour, however, that, while he was a principal instrument in occasioning the division, he was no less active, seventeen years after, in healing it. He wrote and published a pamphlet, the design of which was to bring about a re-union of the two parties; and it was not without very considerable effect.

Whitefield's disciples and admirers in Philadelphia, having formed a new Presbyterian congregation, turned their eyes to Gilbert Tennent as a suitable person to become its pastor; and in May, 1743, just two years after the rupture of the Synod in the same city, they presented their call to him. He accepted it at once, from a conviction that his field of usefulness would thereby be greatly enlarged; and, accordingly, he was regularly released from the church in New Brunswick, which he had served for sixteen years. With the church to which he was now introduced, he continued during the residue of his ministry and of his life, which was about twenty years. He seems to have learned wisdom by his previous experience; for he never afterwards manifested any thing of a controversial spirit, but lived in much harmony with his brethren, and with all around him. His ministry at Philadelphia was marked by great diligence and fidelity, and was attended by many manifest tokens of the Divine blessing. It may be doubted, however, whether his preaching was, to the mass of hearers, so acceptable after his removal as before; for, instead of preaching from short notes, as he had been accustomed to do, he subsequently wrote his sermons out, and read his manuscript somewhat closely; the consequence of which was a considerable loss of force and animation. He displayed his great energy and perseverance, shortly after he went to Philadelphia, in procuring the erection of a spacious and very expensive church edifice for the use of his congregation. He called on Dr. Franklin, and asked him to give him the names of persons to whom he might apply for aid in his enterprise, and Franklin told him to call on every body. He did so, and soon accomplished his object.

In 1753, by request of the Trustees of New Jersey College, the Synod of New York appointed Mr. Tennent, in conjunction with the Rev. (afterwards President) Samuel Davies, to cross the Atlantic, to solicit funds for that institution. The mission was eminently successful; but the only account

of it that remains is found in the diary of Mr. Davies. Nothing is known concerning the impression that Tennent produced in England; but there can be no doubt that, with his comparatively rough exterior, and unpolished manners, he must have suffered not a little from a comparison with his highly accomplished and attractive colleague.

About three years before his death, he became so infirm as to be unable to meet the demands which were made upon him by a large congregation; and, accordingly, in December, 1762, the Rev. George Duffield, then of Carlisle, was called to the co-pastorship with him. This call Mr. Duffield declined; and the congregation remained without another pastor as long as Mr. Tennent lived. He died on the 23d of July, 1764, in the sixty-second year of his age.

Of the circumstances of his death it is believed that the only record that remains is in Dr. Finley's Commemorative Discourse. He says,—

“He had an habitual, unshaken assurance of his interest in redeeming love, for the space of more than forty years; but, eight days before his death, he got a more clear and affecting sense of it still. And though he lamented that he had done so little for God, and that his life had been comparatively unprofitable, yet he triumphed in the grace of Jesus Christ, who had pardoned all his sins, and said his assurance of salvation was built on the Scriptures, and was more sure than the sun and moon.”

President Finley's Sermon just referred to was preached on the 2d of September following his death. This, together with an Appendix, and a Funeral Eulogy by a young gentleman in Philadelphia, was soon after published. The inscription on the monumental stone, which his congregation placed over his remains, was written by his friend Dr. Finley, and is in classic Latin. Mr. Tennent was one of the original Trustees of the College of New Jersey, and held the office till his death.

Of Mr. Tennent's first marriage I find no record, but his wife died a short time before he made his tour to Boston; and he is said to have been “so much supported, that he was able to preach her Funeral Sermon, while she lay before him in the coffin.” His second wife, whose maiden name was Cornelia De Peyster, and who, at the time he was married to her, was the widow of Matthew Clarkson of New York, died on the 19th of March, 1753, aged fifty-seven. He was afterwards married to Mrs. Sarah Spafford, widow of a Mr. Spafford of New Jersey. He had three children by the last marriage. He made his will, October 20, 1763, giving three hundred pounds and his library to his son *Gilbert*, and directing that he should be “put to learning,” in the hope that he might be qualified for the ministry. He provides also for his daughters, *Elizabeth* and *Cornelia*. He constituted his wife, his brother William, and the Worshipful John Lyal of New Brunswick, the guardians of his children. His son was lost at sea. One daughter, *Elizabeth*, died early; the other,—*Cornelia*, was married to Dr. William Smith, a respectable physician of Philadelphia.

The following is a list of Gilbert Tennent's publications:—Solemn Warning to the secure world, from the God of terrible majesty; or, the presumptuous sinner detected, his pleas considered, and his doom displayed, (a volume,) 1735. The necessity of receiving the truth in love, considered in a Sermon preached at New Brunswick, with enlargements, 1735. The dark depths of Divine Providence opened and vindicated from the impertinent cavils of foolish men: In a Sermon on II. Thess. ii. 12, preached at New Brunswick, with enlargements, 1735. Memoir of his brother, John Tennent, and an Expostulatory Address to saints and sinners, 1735. Seven

Sermons in a volume of "Sermons on Sacramental occasions, by divers ministers," 1739. The Righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees considered in a Sermon, 1740. The danger of an unconverted ministry, considered in a Sermon on Mark vi. 34, preached at Nottingham, Pa., 1740. A Sermon on Justification, preached at New Brunswick, 1740. The Espousals, or a Passionate Persuasive to a marriage with the Lamb of God:—In a Sermon preached at New Brunswick, 1741. Remarks on a Protestation presented to the Synod of Philadelphia, 1741. Two Sermons preached at New Brunswick, on the Priestly office of Christ, and the virtue of Charity, 1742. The necessity of holding fast the truth, represented in three Sermons in New York. With an Appendix relating to errors lately vented by some Moravians, &c., 1743. The Examiner Examined, or Gilbert Tennent harmonious. In answer to a pamphlet entitled "The Examiner, or Gilbert against Tennent," &c., 1743. A Sermon at the ordination of Charles Beatty, 1743. Twenty-three Sermons upon the chief end of man, the Divine authority of the Sacred Scriptures, the Being and Attributes of God, and the doctrine of the Trinity, preached in Philadelphia, (a volume, 4to,) 1744. The necessity of thankfulness for wonders of Divine mercies: A Sermon preached at Philadelphia on occasion of the important and glorious victory obtained by the British arms in the Mediterranean, under the conduct of Admiral Matthews, over the united States of France and Spain, and likewise the frustrating a detestable attempt to invade England by a Popish Pretender, 1744. The necessity of keeping the soul: A Sermon preached at Philadelphia, on Deuteronomy iv. 9, 1744. The danger of spiritual pride represented: A Sermon preached at Philadelphia on Romans xii. 3, 1744. The necessity of studying to be quiet and doing our own business: A Sermon preached at Philadelphia, 1744. An Account of a Revival of Religion, published in Prince's Christian History, 1744. A Discourse at the Opening of the new Presbyterian Church. The necessity of praising God for mercies received: A Sermon occasioned by the success of the late expedition, (under the direction and command of General Pepperell and Com. Warren,) in reducing the city and fortresses of Louisburgh on Cape Breton, to the obedience of his Majesty, King George the Second, preached at Philadelphia, 1745. Discourses on several subjects—on the nature of Justification, on the Law, and the necessity of Good Works vindicated, (a volume, 12mo.) 1745. A Sermon on the lawfulness of defensive war, 1747. A Sermon preached at Philadelphia on the day appointed by the Honourable President and Council, to be observed throughout this Province as a day of Fasting and Prayer. With some enlargement, 1748. Brotherly love recommended by the argument of the love of Christ: A Sermon preached at Philadelphia before the Sacramental Solemnity. With some enlargement, 1748. The consistency of defensive war with true Christianity, 1748. The late Association for defence further encouraged; or defensive war defined, and its consistency with true Christianity represented. In a reply to some exceptions against war, in a late composure, entitled, "The Doctrine of Christianity as held by the people called Quakers, vindicated," 1748. (Printed by Franklin.) *Irenicum Ecclesiasticum*; or a humble impartial Essay upon the Peace of Jerusalem, 1749. A Sermon on the Salvation of God, 1749. The substance and scope of both Testaments, or the distinguishing glory of the Gospel: A Sermon on the displays of Divine justice in the propitiatory sacrifice of Christ, preached

at Philadelphia, 1749. A Sermon preached at Burlington, N. J., on the day appointed by his Excellency, the Governor, with the advice of his Majesty's Council, for a Provincial Thanksgiving. Before the Governor and others upon texts chosen by his Excellency. With a Prefatory Address to Philip Doddridge, D. D., 1749. Two Sermons preached at Burlington, N. J., on a day of Public Fasting, on Matthew vi. 16, 17, 18, and Jonah iii. 8. Dedicated to Governor Belcher, 1749. The happiness of rewarding the enemies of our religion and liberty, represented in a Sermon preached at Philadelphia, to an independent company of Volunteers, at the request of their officers, 1756. A Sermon preached in Philadelphia, on the death of Captain William Grant, 1756. Sermons on important subjects adapted to the perilous state of the British nation, lately preached in Philadelphia, (a volume,) 1758. A Persuasive to the right use of the Passions in Religion; or the nature of Religious Zeal explained, its excellency and importance opened and urged, in a Sermon on Revelations iii. 19, preached at Philadelphia 1760.

The following testimony concerning Gilbert Tennent's character is extracted from Dr. Finley's Sermon above referred to:—

“As to his person, he was taller than the common size, and every way proportionable. His aspect was grave and venerable; and though, at first view, he seemed reserved, yet, upon nearer acquaintance, he was ever found to be eminently affable, condescending and communicative; and what greatly endeared his conversation, was an openness and undisguised honesty, at the greatest remove from artifice and dissimulation, which were the abhorrence of his soul while he lived. Besides, he was tender, loving and compassionate; kind and agreeable in every relation; an assured friend to such as he esteemed worthy of his regard, and a common patron to all who, he apprehended, were injured or distressed.

“He was of a truly public spirit, and seemed to feel the various cases of mankind in general; but very sensibly partook in all the good or ill that befell his country; and while he guarded against being unministerially pragmatical, yet, so far as he judged it consistent with his character, he warmly interested himself in whatever seemed to contribute to the safety and advantage of this Province in particular. He needed no other motive to exert himself, than only to be persuaded that the matter in question was an important public good; and, in such cases, he was much regarded, not only because of his known integrity, but his generous and catholic disposition. For, although he was a great lover of truth, and very zealous for its propagation, yet he was so far above a narrow party spirit, that he loved and honoured all who seemed to have the root of the matter in them, and made it their business to promote the essentials of religion, though they were, in various points, opposed to his own sentiments.

“He was, moreover, an example of great fortitude and unshaken resolution. Whatever appeared to him subservient to the advancement of the Redeemer's Kingdom, the salvation of souls, or the common good of mankind, he pursued with spirit; and what he did, he did with his might. If the end seemed to be attainable, great obstructions and difficulties in the way were so far from dispiriting, that they rather animated, him in his efforts; nor would he give up the point, while one glimpse of hope remained. Hence he accomplished many important matters, which one less determined and enterprising would presently have abandoned as desperate. He would go through honour and dishonour, through evil report and good report; and though he had sensibility with respect to his personal character, as well as other men, yet, if preserving it seemed, at any time, to require the omission of duty or sinful compliances, he readily determined to expose himself to all risks; and if adhering to the will of God should be accounted vile, he resolved he would yet be more vile.

“A great part of his life was a scene of unremitted labour. He studied hard, travelled much, and preached often, while his health and other circumstances permitted. He was instant in season and out of season,—always about his Master's business. They who have journeyed or been often with him in company, could not but observe his constant endeavours to do good by his conversation; to introduce some convincing or edifying topics; and his watching for proper occasions for speaking of God. And very faithful was he in warning sinners of their danger, and persuading them to seek salvation in earnest. Thus he plainly shewed how much religion was his element, and promoting it the delightful business of his life; how benevolent towards



mankind he was, and how precious immortal souls were in his esteem. Every advantage accruing to them, or to the interests of religion in general, he reckoned as clear gain to himself; nor were they who divide the spoil ever more joyful than I have known him to be, on occasion of the hopeful conversion of sinners, whether by his own or the ministry of others; and often has his soul wept in secret places, for the pride and obstinacy of those who refused to be reclaimed.

“His great reading, with his various and long experience of the workings both of grace and corruption in the heart, made him a wise and skilful casuist, who could resolve perplexing exercises of mind with clearness, and comfort others with those consolations wherewith he himself, in like cases, had been comforted of God.

“He was a faithful attendant on the judicatures of the Church, as is natural for one so anxiously concerned for the interest of religion as he was; and, having accurately observed the effects of a lax and negligent government in some churches, he became a more strenuous assessor of due and strict discipline. But, above other things, the purity of the ministry was his care; and therefore, at the hazard of the displeasure of many, and in the face of reproach, he zealously urged every scriptural method, by which carnal and earthly-minded men might be kept from entering into it, and men of piety and zeal as well as learning introduced.

“As a preacher, few equalled him in his vigorous days. His reasoning powers were strong; his thoughts nervous and often sublime; his style flowery and diffusive; his manner of address warm and pathetic,—such as must convince his audience that he was in earnest; and his voice clear and commanding; and in a word, all things conspired to make him a judicious, zealous, popular and pungent preacher. With admirable dexterity, he detected the bold presumer, discovered the vanity of his confidence, and exposed the formal hypocrite to his own view.”

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## JOHN TENNENT.\*

1729—1732.

JOHN TENNENT, the third son of William Tennent, (Senior,) was born in the County of Antrim, in Ireland, November 12, 1706. He was but twelve years old, when his father came with his family to this country.

He had naturally strong feelings and a somewhat hasty temper, which often occasioned him sore trouble and bitter repentance. His mental exercises, previous to and at the time of his hopeful conversion to God, were most intense, and for a while he seems well nigh to have yielded to the conviction that his case was hopeless. His brother Gilbert, in describing his situation at that time, says,—“I have, through the riches of free grace, been favoured with the sight of many a convinced sinner, but never did I behold any other in such a rack of acute and continued anguish, under the dismal apprehensions of impending ruin and eternal misery, from the vengeance of a just and holy God.” So bitter was his agony, that, at one time, he lay speechless for some minutes, and was supposed to be actually in the article of death; but, a few hours after, his countenance kindled with a glow of rapture, and he requested his brother to sing the thirty-fourth Psalm, in which he also joined with uncommon clearness and energy. His brother William was at that time exceedingly ill, and supposed to be past recovery; but such was the fervour of his spirit, that he walked a distance of thirty rods to see that sick brother, that he might communicate to him, on this side the grave, the surprising deliverance of which he had been the subject. Subsequently to this, he was subject to intervals of great doubt in respect to the genuineness of his religious experience; though his mind soon settled into an habitually trusting and happy state.

\* Memoir by Gilbert Tennent.—Hist. Log. Coll.—Webster's MSS.