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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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District of New York.

and sincerity, never professing what he did not feel. His manners were the natural expression of his open and generous temper. He was a very pattern of hospitality,—his house open for the accommodation of all, but especially those who were of the household of faith. He was quick and tender in his sympathies for the afflicted, and was always on the alert to dispense aid or administer consolation, as the exigencies of the case might require.”

Yours very sincerely,

D. L. SWAIN.

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### JOSHUA LACY WILSON, D. D.\*

1802—1846.

JOSHUA LACY WILSON, the son of Henry and Agnes (Lacy) Wilson, was born in Bedford County, Va., September 22, 1774. His father was an educated physician, and every way correct in his external deportment, but not a professor of religion. His mother, who was a sister of the Rev. Drury Lacy, a distinguished clergyman in Virginia, was an exemplary member of the Baptist Church. He was the youngest of three children. When he was about four years of age, his father died, leaving his family in very straitened circumstances. His mother taught her children the first rudiments of a common education,—the family library consisting only of an indifferent copy of the Scriptures, a copy of Watts' Hymns, and the Westminster Shorter Catechism. Sometime after his father's death, his mother formed a second matrimonial connection with John Templin, the father of Terah Templin, who, as a licentiate, was the first Presbyterian who ever preached the Gospel in Kentucky.

In the year 1779, his step-father went to seek a residence in Kentucky; and the family followed him in 1781. They lived for a time in a picketed fort on Salt River, called Wilson's Station, after a family with which they were in no way connected. Young Wilson, until he was twenty-two years of age, was occupied in subduing the forest, cultivating the soil, and hunting wild animals; but, at that period, his mind became permanently impressed with the subject of religion, and he soon resolved to devote himself to the work of the ministry. About the same time, he entered the Kentucky Academy, at Pisgah; having until now been unacquainted with the first elements of English Grammar. After remaining here about a year, he entered a private school taught by the Rev. William Mahon†; but when, at the end of a year and a half, this school was discontinued, he engaged in teaching a school himself, in Frankfort, Ky. During his residence here, he was induced to commence the study of Law; which, however, he did not continue long, on account of the failure of his health. He subsequently turned his attention again to the ministry, and went to live in the

\* MSS. from his son,—Rev. S. R. Wilson, and Rev. Thomas Cleland, D. D.

† WILLIAM MAHON was a native of Virginia, and was the first minister who had charge of the New Providence Church, Ky., which was organized by the Rev. David Rice in 1785, and over which the venerable Dr. Thomas Cleland has presided (1857) forty-two years. In connection with that church, he preached to another not far distant, and at the same time taught a small classical school. He became a subject of Presbyterian discipline, and died under a cloud.

family of the Rev. James Vance,\* who was then engaged in conducting a classical school near Louisville. He assisted in the school, at the same time pursuing his theological studies under the direction of Mr. Vance. He was licensed to preach at Spring Hill, Tenn., in 1802; and was ordained at Union Meeting House in Mercer County, Ky., at the same time with Mr. (now Rev. Dr.) Thomas Cleland, in October, 1804,—when he took charge of the Churches of Bardstown and Big Spring. This was about eight years after he recited his first lesson in grammar. In 1805, he sat as a member of the Commission of Synod in the Cumberland difficulties. In 1808, he became Pastor of the First Presbyterian Church in Cincinnati, where he remained for thirty-eight years,—part of the time teaching a classical school.

He was honoured with the degree of Doctor of Divinity from Cincinnati College, where, for some time, he acted as Professor of Moral Philosophy.

In the great controversy which divided the Presbyterian Church in 1837, Dr. Wilson bore an active and prominent part,—not doubting that the interests of true Presbyterianism were deeply involved in the issue. Though he had been favourable to the placing of Dr. Lyman Beecher at the head of the Lane Seminary, he subsequently became so much dissatisfied with what he believed to be his theological views, that he prosecuted him for heresy, first before the Presbytery, and next, before the Synod of Cincinnati, in October, 1835. Regarding the doings of the Synod in the case as unduly lenient, he carried an appeal to the General Assembly of 1836; but was subsequently induced to withdraw it, on the ground that there was another case pending before the Assembly, involving the principle which he wished to have decided.

Though Dr. Wilson possessed originally a vigorous constitution, it was greatly impaired, while he was yet in early manhood, by a protracted illness occasioned by exposure in rescuing a lad from drowning. His ministry was exercised in the midst of much bodily suffering, and for a long period he was obliged to preach in a sitting posture, and sometimes with his eyes entirely closed, on account of an inflammation induced by studying before daylight; it being his custom for many years to rise at three o'clock in the morning. During the last six years of his life, he could scarcely ever be said to be free from pain; though he was enabled to continue his pastoral labours till within about three weeks of his death. He preached his last sermon on Sabbath afternoon, July 19, 1846, from the words—"Thou art not far from the Kingdom of God." On Tuesday following, he was taken ill; but it was not until Saturday, (the 25th,) that his disease assumed an alarming character. From that time his suffering was most intense; but, in the midst of it all, he evinced the most tranquil submission to his Heavenly Father's will. He died on Friday, the 14th of August, lacking less than a month and a half of being seventy-two years of age. The principal Address at his Funeral was delivered by the Rev. L. G. Gaines, whom Dr. Wilson had himself designated to perform that service. His remains were first interred in the Presbyterian burying-ground in Cincinnati; but have

\* JAMES VANCE resided about eighteen miles East of Louisville, in Jefferson County, Ky., and had charge of two congregations. In the latter years of his life he was rendered nearly helpless by means of rheumatism. He had a younger brother, *William*, a young man of much more than ordinary promise, who was licensed to preach in the year 1803, and was to have been settled over the Church at Danville, and another in the same neighbourhood; but, after preaching a single sermon to each, was suddenly called from his earthly labours.

since, in compliance with the wishes of his widow, been removed to the Spring Grove Cemetery, where they now repose. The Church which he served so long and so faithfully has erected a handsome monument to his memory.

On the 22d of October, 1801, he was married to Sarah, daughter of George Mackey. She was a native of Baltimore, Md., was early left motherless, and while she was yet young, went with her father to Kentucky. They had eight children—four sons and four daughters. One son is a clergyman,—successor to his father in the First Presbyterian Church in Cincinnati; one is an educated physician, settled in Shelbyville, Ky.; and one daughter is married to the Rev. Samuel Lynn, Pastor of the First Presbyterian Church, Newport, Ky.

The following is a list of Dr. Wilson's publications:—Episcopal Methodism or Dagonism exhibited: in five scenes, 1811. War the work of the Lord, and the Coward cursed: A Sermon delivered to the Cincinnati Light Infantry Companies at the request of Captains Mansfield and Sloan, shortly before they marched to Detroit, 1812. The character of an officer and duty of a soldier: A Sermon preached to the Regiment of Ohio Militia commanded by Colonel Samuel Borden, 1820. The Testimony of Three who bear witness in earth, on the Fact and Mode of Purification: A Sermon delivered in Lebanon, O., 1827. Four Propositions sustained against the claims of the American Home Missionary Society, 1831. Four Sermons entitled "Methods of Peace"—"The Character of man"—"The Sanctuary polluted"—"The Sanctuary cleansed"—(published in a volume of Original Sermons by Presbyterian ministers in the Valley of the Mississippi,) 1833. One Proposition sustained against the New School, 1835. A Letter addressed to R. H. Bishop, D. D., on the subject of his "Plea for united Christian action addressed particularly to Presbyterians," 1835. The Moderator and Ultra Partizans; or a Review of the Biblical Repertory for January, 1835, on "The present state of the Presbyterian Church" and "Act and Testimony, No. vii.," 1835. Imputation of Sin and Righteousness: A Sermon from Romans v. 18, 19, 1835. Plea in the case of Lyman Beecher, D. D., made before the Synod of Cincinnati, 1835. The Faith Kept; or Recollections of Rev. Daniel Hayden\*: A Discourse delivered at Pleasant Ridge, 1835. Relations and duties of Servants and Masters: A Sermon from Ephesians vi. 5-9, 1839. A Sermon in memory of the death of William Henry Harrison, late President of the United States, 1841. The Kingdom of God delineated: A Sermon, 1842. A Sermon on Witchcraft, 1845. A Second Sermon on the same subject, 1846.

\* DANIEL HAYDEN was born on the 9th of April, 1781, in Redstone County, Pa.; became sceptical in early life, but was hopefully converted during a revival of religion; entered Jefferson College in 1801, and graduated in 1805; after leaving College, took charge of the Greensburg Academy, and retained his connection with it until 1807 or 1808, when he was licensed as a probationer for the Gospel ministry by the Presbytery of Erie; became Pastor of the Pleasant Ridge Church, under the care of the Presbytery of Cincinnati, in 1809; and died August 27, 1835, aged fifty-four. Dr. Wilson represents him as having been an eminently faithful and zealous minister.

FROM THE REV. THOMAS CLELAND, D. D.

McAFEE, Ky., July 10, 1857.

My dear Sir: I knew Dr. Wilson well, especially in the earlier part of his life, but so long a time has elapsed since my intimacy with him ceased, that I have little or nothing to say in respect to him that will be to your purpose. My acquaintance with him commenced at the Kentucky Academy, in Woodford County, in 1797, where we met as school-mates. He was then tall and full grown, and was considered a diligent student, and a young man of more than ordinary promise. It was at that time that he made the acquaintance of the young lady who afterwards became his wife. Some years after marriage, and after his settlement at Bardstown, I saw her baptized by the Rev. A. Cameron, on a Sacramental occasion, in the presence of a large congregation, assembled in a grove. I may add that she was a sensible, pious, prudent, industrious wife, an affectionate mother, and highly respected by all her acquaintances.

Dr. Wilson and myself were settled in contiguous places from the autumn of 1804 till 1808, when he removed to Cincinnati—during that period, we were frequently together, assisting each other at Communion seasons, and sometimes on other occasions also; but, after his removal, our meetings were very infrequent, and I can scarcely be said to have had any intercourse with him.

Dr. Wilson was highly acceptable as Pastor of the Churches over which he was first settled; but he was not a little embarrassed in his work by being obliged to teach a school, and even then not being able to make out for himself an adequate support. In this respect, indeed, he was not distinguished from most of his brethren in those days; though the evil was not the less from being shared with many others. In social intercourse he was always friendly and agreeable. In the pulpit he had much more than ordinary advantages. His person was commanding, his manner attractive, his voice melodious, distinct, and every way pleasant. His discourses were very respectable—sometimes rising above, and sometimes falling a little below, his own standard; but it would have been strange if it had been otherwise, considering how much he was harrassed by numerous distracting cares and avocations. He did not, by any means, reach the zenith of his fame as a preacher, until after his removal to Cincinnati, where he had the opportunity of prosecuting his studies with more vigour and less interruption.

I may allude to one trait in Dr. Wilson's character, which was somewhat marked at the period of my intimacy with him, though I believe it gradually lessened with advancing years, and finally disappeared almost altogether—I refer to a sort of impulsiveness,—I may say impetuosity, in his treatment of opponents, whether in public or in more private circles. He would become, for the moment, greatly excited; and then the effervescence of his feelings would subside, and he would appear as gentle as a lamb, and would not be slow to make any apology or atonement which he thought the case demanded. With great strength of character he combined much that could not fail to attract him strongly to his friends. Those who knew him in his latter years can tell you much more than I can of his more mature intellectual and moral developments.

Most affectionately and fraternally yours,

THOMAS CLELAND.

FROM THE HON. C. S. TODD.

SHELBYVILLE, Ky., 8th August, 1857.

Rev. and dear Sir: My associations with the Rev. Dr. Joshua L. Wilson reach back to an early period of my life. When I was quite in my boyhood, he taught

a school in Frankfort, and I was one of his pupils. I do not suppose that, at that time, considering what his previous advantages had been, he could have been a very accomplished scholar; but whatever he did teach, he taught well; and though I was then too young to form a just estimate of his character, the impressions which I received in respect to him were substantially the same with those which he made upon me in after life. As he was in the *school*, so he was in the church, in the deliberative assembly, in civil society, everywhere. He had a very strongly marked character, and wherever he was, he was sure to make himself felt.

After leaving his school at Frankfort, I had no intercourse with him until, during the war with Great Britain, of 1812, I was stationed for some time at Cincinnati, where I had the opportunity of hearing him preach and occasionally enjoying his society. In the year 1840, I went to reside at Cincinnati for a year, and, during that time, was a regular attendant on his ministry. I met him once also, I recollect, as a member of the General Assembly. My relations with him were not only very agreeable, but I may say, somewhat intimate; and there is hardly any man who has passed away of whom I can speak with more confidence of not misrepresenting him.

There was something in Dr. Wilson's personal appearance that was singularly impressive and commanding. You might see him in a crowd, and you would feel assured that whatever the rest might be, *he* was a man of unyielding resolution and great force of character. He had a fine, stately form, and a countenance on which the lines of intellect were too strongly drawn to escape the observation even of the passing stranger. And his face was a true exponent of his mind and heart—he had great native power and vigour of intellect and great strength of feeling; combined, however, with much natural kindness and susceptibility of tender emotion. He was not capable of going half way in any thing—in all his opinions, principles, maxims of conduct, views of religious truth, he was thoroughly decided, and was always able to give a reason which was at least satisfactory to himself. With such a constitution, you would naturally expect that he would not be likely to incur the wo threatened upon those of whom all men speak well. In the collisions incident to his course of life, he had to meet many a vigorous opponent, and encounter many a sharp blast; but while he was not the man to flinch under any possible circumstances, and would sometimes be complained of by his adversary for severity or obstinacy, I do not believe that any body ever ventured even a whisper against his integrity. In taking the strong ground that he often did, he was not influenced by any personal considerations, much less by the semblance of ill will, but by his own honest conviction of what was due to truth and right; and there he felt himself perfectly impregnable.

As a preacher, I reckon Dr. Wilson, at the period of his greatest strength, as decidedly among the ablest of his day. His appearance in the pulpit was greatly in his favour. There was a dignified, as well as solemn and reverential, air about him, that would bespeak your attention before he opened his lips. And then, when he did speak, his voice, though not very loud, was uncommonly melodious and distinct, and could be heard to the extremities of any church without the least effort. His manner was natural, simple, earnest, and accompanied by a good deal of gesture, which was evidently the prompting of his feelings at the moment, and not at all the result of previous study. His sermons, though not read, and I suppose generally not written beyond a mere outline, were clear and logical in their structure, and therefore easily remembered by an attentive hearer; while they were always rich in evangelical truth. No matter whether he exhibited doctrine or enforced duty, he did it with an air of strength and boldness, that showed you that he deeply realized the importance of what he was saying, and

that he was bent upon making you feel it too. His preaching was eminently fitted to minister to the edification and stability of the Church.

In an ecclesiastical judicatory, Dr. Wilson was perfectly at home, and was always felt to be a controlling spirit. Ever watchful against the approach of what he believed to be error, and on the alert to resist its inroads, it was no matter to him though he stood alone,—he was sure to speak out his honest convictions. He was perfectly familiar with the forms of ecclesiastical procedure, and in the most involved case, was never perplexed as to the course which ought to be pursued. In or out of a deliberative body, he would have followed his convictions of duty, if they had required him to break every earthly tie, or even led him to the martyr's stake.

In private life he was sociable, kind and obliging. Though he was habitually grave in his deportment, he often discovered a vein of pleasantry, and would relate a striking anecdote; and I have occasionally seen him enjoy a hearty laugh as much as any other man. But he was an eminently devout man, and I doubt not, much more than the mass of Christians, had his conversation in Heaven. He was greatly respected in the community in which he lived, and it will be many a day before the name of Joshua L. Wilson will cease to be reverently and gratefully pronounced in many a family in Cincinnati.

I am, as ever, yours truly and fraternally,

C. S. TODD.

FROM THE REV. ROBERT G. WILSON, D. D.

SOUTH SALEM, ROSS COUNTY, O., January 24, 1849.

Rev. Sir: Your letter requesting my recollections of the late Rev. Dr. Joshua L. Wilson of Cincinnati, has remained unanswered for several weeks, because the grasshopper has become a burden to me, and I am scarcely able, by reason of age and infirmity, to write a legible hand. I am unwilling altogether to deny your request, and yet I am unable to comply with it, except in a very general and imperfect manner.

I knew Dr. Wilson intimately through a long course of years. One of his most prominent traits was a sterling integrity, that never suffered him to relax from his convictions of truth or duty, a single iota,—no matter what might be the end to be gained by it. His theological views were strictly in harmony with the Confession of Faith in our Church, and no man was less disposed than he to tolerate any departures from it. He had a vigorous and discriminating mind, well adapted to theological research. He had great strength and ardour of feeling, which he carried into every enterprise in which he engaged. His discourses were clear, logical and able expositions of Divine truth. He maintained a shining Christian character to the last. His son worthily fills his place.

Regretting that my infirmity does not permit me to say more,

I am very respectfully yours,

R. G. WILSON.