

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCHES

AND

SERMONS,

OF SOME OF THE

FIRST MINISTERS OF THE ASSOCIATE CHURCH IN AMERICA.

TO WHICH IS PREFIXED

A HISTORICAL INTRODUCTION,

CONTAINING AN ACCOUNT OF THE RISE AND PROGRESS OF THE ASSOCIATE CHURCH FOR THE FIRST HALF CENTURY OF HER EXISTENCE IN THIS COUNTRY.

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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

OF THE REV. JOHN ANDERSON, D. D.

MR. ANDERSON was born on the south side of the Tweed, but so near it, that the congregation where his parents attended public worship was on the Scotch side. He was baptized by the venerable James Morrison of Norham, many years stated clerk to the General Associate Synod of Scotland. It is believed that his youth was passed, under the pastoral care of Mr. Morrison. It is certain that he entertained, for that venerable man, the most affectionate regard during the whole course of Mr. Morrison's long life; and a regular correspondence by letter was maintained between them, until Mr. Morrison's death. The writer of this sketch, recollects being shown by Dr. Anderson a letter from Mr. Morrison to him, written after he was ninety-one years of age.

Mr. Anderson was born about the year 1748. But little is known of his parents. If his own statements, very incidentally made respecting them, are rightly recollected, his father died before his remembrance; his mother set out with him for America, but died on the passage. He would sometimes allude to practices and remarks of his mother which showed her to be a woman of strong mind and unaffected piety. He was an only child; and never having had any of his own kindred in this country, and his habits of thinking and current of remarks, seldom leading him to speak of himself or his family connections; nothing is particularly known concerning them, more than what has been just related. His education was received in Scotland, but at which of the universities is likewise unknown. Nor indeed is this a matter of much consequence, especially in the case of a man of such extensive and various learning as Dr. Anderson; whose whole life was devoted to the successful pursuit of knowledge; and

whose attainments plainly showed, that he had left the usual acquirements of an academic or university course far behind. He studied Theology under the care of the Professor of the Associate Synod, who, it is believed, was at the time of his course, the younger Moncrief. After having completed the usual course of study, he was licensed: and having preached for some time as a probationer, it was found that his voice was too feeble, for the audiences which then generally attended the worshipping assemblies of the Associate Church in Scotland. And although it was his ardent desire to serve his divine Master and his generation, in preaching the everlasting gospel, yet on account of his voice, he was obliged to abandon it in Scotland. His accuracy as a scholar, and particularly his very correct taste, in language and every thing connected with composition, were known—for as a linguist and a *belles-lettres* scholar, he was justly entitled to take the first rank among the scholars of that age—and when he desisted from public speaking, he found ready employment as a corrector of the press, in large book-printing establishments, both in Glasgow and Edinburgh. And in this business he occupied himself during several years afterwards, that he remained in Scotland.

During the time that he was thus employed, his mind was still occupied about the concerns of the church. He found leisure to compose and publish a series of Essays on several important religious subjects. These Essays show a deep and thorough acquaintance with revealed truth, and a mind sensitive to its interests. Those who will compare these Essays with his latest writings, published nearly fifty years afterwards, can not but be struck with the undeviating consistency with which he held fast his religious principles. This publication brought him into favorable notice, both as a divine and a scholar.

When the Coalescence between some members of the Presbytery of Pennsylvania and the Reformed Presbytery in this country, in 1782, took place, by which the Associate Presbytery was almost annihilated, and when the Presbytery's need of aid was known in Scotland; Mr. Anderson was recommended to come immediately to America, and render such aid to the brethren here, as he might be enabled to do. Supposing that the audiences must necessarily be much smaller here, than they generally were in Scotland, it was thought that he might be usefully employed in preaching. Accordingly, he made his arrangements to come as soon as practicable, and arrived in Philadelphia in 1783. The first sermon he preach-

ed after his arrival, was from Psalm xlvi. 5. "God is in the midst of her. She shall not be moved. God shall help her and that right early." This was in Mr. Marshall's meeting-house in Philadelphia. In the choosing of his text and in his discourse, he seemed to have a particular reference to the state of the Associate Church in this country. Those who heard this discourse, considered it highly seasonable and reviving to the interests and refreshing to the friends of truth. Mr. Marshall, knowing what had been his difficulty with regard to preaching in Scotland, and apprehensive that the same cause might prevent the edification of his people on that occasion, requested the congregation, before Mr. Anderson commenced, to draw as near the pulpit as possible. He was, however, heard with more satisfaction than had been apprehended. And although his own congregation and those who became familiar with his manner of speaking, heard him without any particular inconvenience, yet it was always a complaint with strangers, through the whole of his ministry, that they heard him with difficulty. It may be here remarked, that although the difficulty that attended his speaking might in part be ascribed to the organic structure of the vocal organs, yet much of it doubtless arose from habits which were the effects of a strong degree of constitutional diffidence—a feeling often found in the greatest men. Those who had an opportunity of closely observing Dr. Anderson's habits, could readily enough see, that with this difficulty, he had to contend through his whole life, unless when a sense of duty, arising from a regard to some truth either in doctrine or practice, roused all the energies of his mind; then for a time he would appear wholly to overcome it. Under such circumstances, he has spoken during the whole of the public exercises of a day, so as not only to be heard with ease over a large assembly, but in a manner truly eloquent. Indeed, he seldom preached a whole day, in which he did not in some part of his discourses, become roused up to speak, for a few minutes, in the spirit, both as to language and manner, of the most genuine eloquence.

During the first two years after the Union, the operations of the Presbytery were confined chiefly to the eastern counties of Pennsylvania. And there in the vacancies under Presbytery's care, Dr. Anderson labored with great faithfulness and distinguished success for that period. For the intelligent and the pious always heard him with interest and satisfaction. And such always found delight and refreshment in

the clear arrangement of his discourses, and the strain of evangelical doctrine, in which they never failed to abound.

During the summer of 1784, the attention of all the members of Presbytery was much occupied with the preparation of the Testimony; for although the drafting of it was assigned to Mr. Beveridge, there was need of frequent consultations among the members, and frequent meetings of Presbytery: so that although there were applications from several places west of the Alleghany mountains as well as from the State of New York, no assistance could be sent, as the members could not be so far separated, until both the Narrative and Testimony were completed and adopted. This was done, as stated in another part of this volume, viz. the Testimony on the 25th of August, and the Narrative on the 25th of October of that year. It is to be borne in mind that there were then but four members in the Presbytery, viz. Messrs. Marshall, Clarkson, Anderson and Beveridge. Mr. Anderson was at that time stated clerk of Presbytery. As soon as circumstances permitted, Mr. Beveridge was sent to the State of New York, and Dr. Anderson to the western parts of Pennsylvania; and where he was the instrument of planting those congregations in which he was eventually settled.

The legal spirit which prevailed in the General Assembly of the church of Scotland, and which prompted that judicatory in 1720 to condemn the Marrow of Modern Divinity, and the doctrines taught in that book, very early manifested itself in the most numerous branch of the Presbyterian Church in this country. In 1754, the New Castle Presbytery issued a warning against Messrs. Gellatly and Arnot, then newly arrived, in which that Presbytery virtually condemned the Marrow doctrine. This called forth a very able defence of these doctrinal points, and refutation of the warning, by Mr. Gellatly. But still these doctrines were extensively opposed by many ministers in that body. To establish his people in these fundamental gospel truths, Dr. Anderson was led to preach on the nature of Justifying Faith. The continued opposition made to the doctrines of the Reformation on this subject, at length led him to embody his views on it, in six discourses, in which "The Scripture Doctrine of the Appropriation, which is in the Nature of Saving Faith, is Stated and Illustrated." This is probably the clearest and most satisfactory treatise on the subject extant in the English language. It was first published in Philadelphia, 1793, and a second edition in Edinburgh, 1797, and a third in Philadelphia, 1823.

While on the subject of Dr. Anderson's labors as an au-

thor, we may here also notice his treatise on Psalmody, "Vindiciæ Cantus Dominici." This work, which will long remain as a standard work on the subject, and will be held in estimation as an able defence of the scriptural purity of divine worship, especially in the ordinance of praise, was occasioned by the very general introduction of a human psalmody, in the worship of God, instead of the songs of inspiration, by the General Assembly Presbyterian Church, in this country. This work was published in Philadelphia, in 1800. This, again, was succeeded in 1806, by his Letters in defence of Hervey and Marshall, against the attacks of Mr. Bellamy of New England, who not only opposed, but misrepresented the views of these eminent British divines. This work is entitled "Precious Truth," and is a valuable defence and elucidation of the views of the fathers of the Reformation, on the subject of Justification and other collateral doctrines. His last and largest work, is his "Dialogues on Church Communion," published at Pittsburgh, 1820. The general reason for the appearance of this work, was the prevalence of Latitudinarian sentiments, on the subject of church fellowship; but a special call for such a work, arose out of the publication of the late Dr. Mason of New York, entitled "A Plea for Communion on Catholic Principles;" in which work the popular sentiments and feelings of the day were embodied and presented in a very plausible form. In this work the reader will find Dr. Mason's arguments stripped of their sophistical and gaudy dress, and the scriptural doctrine of visible church-fellowship, very clearly set forth. And in another part of the work, the principles of the Associate Church, wherein they differ from other denominations, very clearly and candidly stated.

In addition to these writings, which we may safely predict will yet be held, and at no very distant period we trust, in higher estimation than they have ever yet been, by the friends of truth, Dr. Anderson contributed to the defence of truth in his day, by several other publications, though of a more ephemeral character.

As an author, Dr. Anderson contributed largely to promote the cause of truth and piety in this country. And those who knew him intimately, can attest that he did this no less as a pastor and professor of Theology, and by that bright exemplification of all the christian graces, which shone in his whole character and conversation. It is not proposed in this brief sketch, to do justice to his memory in any of these particulars; but an outline at least should be entered on record,

if nothing more be done, that his example may be remembered and imitated by those who would be "followers of them, who through faith and patience, inherit the promises."

He was settled as pastor over the united congregations of (what was then called) Mill Creek and Harman's Creek, near the western line of Pennsylvania, which then lay scattered over a great extent of country. As circumstances permitted, new charges were erected within the same bounds; and his was contracted within narrower limits, until his meeting-houses were but eight miles distant from each other; the names of the congregations being changed to Service and King's Creek.

In the discharge of the various pastoral duties, Dr. Anderson was a remarkable example of diligence and fidelity. Indeed his whole heart was in his work—he lived wholly for his divine Master, and for the spiritual interests of his people. Perhaps no man since the days of the apostles, was more eminently endowed with the true spirit of his station. His pulpit exercises, in their matter, were always solid, judicious and practical; in method, distinct; in arrangement, natural; in style, like his printed compositions, they were models of plainness, simplicity and perspicuity.

As a professor of theology, which office he held from about the year 1792 until 1819, he was no less distinguished for his industry and singular usefulness. His lectures were written and re-written, from time to time, as his own reflections and various and extensive reading suggested improvements. But perhaps none of his qualifications as a professor, contributed so much to form the character of his students, as his critical acuteness in judging of a discourse. If a discourse was deficient in perspicuity or logical arrangement, his well trained and judicious mind soon detected and convincingly exhibited the fault. And the ear of the adept in music was not more quick to discern a discordant note, than was his to detect a sentiment that accorded not with the oracles of God; or even an expression that varied from "sound speech that cannot be condemned."

At the age of seventy-one or two his growing infirmities admonished him to resign the professorship, which he had held about twenty-seven years. He had several times before proposed tendering his resignation, but had still been prevailed upon by the members of Synod to defer it.

His bodily constitution was strong, and until the year before he resigned the professorship, he had never been prevented from preaching a single Sabbath, by sickness or bodily infirmity; when he had an attack of sickness, which greatly

impaired his constitution, and from that time he began visibly to decline in health and bodily vigor. But he still continued to discharge the various pastoral duties with a zeal and activity which yielded but slowly and reluctantly to his increasing frailties, until April 6th, 1830, when, in the 82d year of his age, and 48th of the exercise of his ministry in this country, he was suddenly called to his eternal rest.

The particulars of his death were singular, and are worthy of being recorded. He preached on Sabbath, two days previous to his death, at King's Creek, the more distant place from his residence. On Monday a meeting of the congregation was held, in order to take measures to procure an assistant to their venerable pastor. He attended at this meeting, and preached a discourse from these words, "Thy name is like ointment poured forth, therefore do the virgins love thee." (Song i. 3.) After sermon he rode on towards Buffalo meeting house, which was about twenty miles from King's Creek, where the Presbytery was to meet next day. He was accompanied by Mr. John Leiper, one of his elders. He sat in Presbytery all day, until evening, when it adjourned, and took his usual share and interest in the proceedings. After Presbytery adjourned, he and his elder rode about three miles homeward, and lodged at the house of Mr. James Patterson, an elder of the congregation at Buffalo. He complained a little of weariness, and retired to rest about 10 o'clock. Mr. Leiper retired also to the same room in which Dr. A. slept. He awoke, and remarked that he felt some headache, but appeared again immediately to fall asleep. About midnight he arose out of bed, and instantly fell on the floor. Both Mr. Leiper and Mr. Patterson heard the fall and sprang to his assistance; but before a light could be procured his spirit had departed to God who gave it.

Thus was this eminent and faithful servant permitted to continue in the actual service of his Master, in which he delighted, until the last hour of his long and useful life.

Dr. Anderson was capable of bearing an application to study, to which few men could ever attain. Unless when called out on official duties, he seldom spent less than fourteen hours out of the twenty-four in diligent application to study, or in devotional exercises. His body and his mind seemed alike insensible to the weariness of study, and neither seemed to require refreshment by exercise. As an evidence of the soundness of his bodily faculties, his hearing was unimpaired; and he was able to read in a small pocket Bible without glasses to the last.

As to his Christian graces, meekness and humility might be said to predominate. He was also most conscientiously and scrupulously tender of the feelings of all, even to the very least, with whom he had intercourse.

Dr. Anderson was married, shortly after his settlement, to Elizabeth McCoy, a member of his own congregation, but had no issue. Mrs. Anderson still survives, though laboring under the infirmities of extreme old age.

In closing this short sketch of the life and character of one, who stood to the writer in the interesting and important relation of pastor and theological teacher, the words of the Apostle suggest themselves, "Remember them who have the rule over you, who have spoken unto you the word of God; whose faith follow, considering the end of their conversation, Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, and to-day, and forever."