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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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AMZI ARMSTRONG, D. D.*

1795—1827.

AMZI ARMSTRONG was born in Florida, Orange County, N. Y., on the 1st of December, 1771. His parents, Francis and Jane (Borland) Armstrong, were of Irish extraction, *their* parents having migrated to this country not far from the year, 1730. His father was a farmer, and an elder in the Presbyterian Church. He (the son) commenced the study of the languages, when he was quite young, under the tuition of the Rev. Amzi Lewis,† then Pastor of the Church at Florida. Subsequently to this, he spent two years, as a member of Dr. Dwight's school at Greenfield, Conn. He was never connected as a student with any College.

Before entering the ministry, he was engaged for a while, as a teacher in Bloomfield, N. J. He pursued his theological studies under the direction of the Rev. Jedediah Chapman of Orange in the same State. He was taken under the care of the Presbytery of New York as a candidate, on the 5th of October, 1794, and was licensed to preach on the 23d of October, 1795. The same Presbytery ordained him to the work of the ministry, and installed him as Pastor of the Church in Mendham, Morris County, N. J., on the 29th of November, 1796. Here he continued laboriously and zealously engaged for twenty years. His pastoral relation being dissolved by the Presbytery of Jersey,‡ on the 2d of October, 1816, he removed to Bloomfield to take charge of the Academy in that place, with the intention to make it a school for the instruction of young men in a course of preparation for the ministry. It was, however, his own private school for a number of years; though he ultimately disposed of it to the Presbyterian branch of the Education Society, whose Executive Committee

* MSS. from his family.

† AMZI LEWIS, a son of Samuel Lewis, was born at Canterbury, Conn., October 18, 1746; was graduated at Yale College in 1768; and was ordained Pastor of the Churches of Florida and Warwick, in Orange County, N. Y., April 9, 1772. Within a few years after his settlement, he was dismissed from the pastoral care of the Warwick Congregation, but continued his connection with the Congregation of Florida until November, 1787, when he left with their consent,—having laboured among them about sixteen years. During his connection with the Florida Congregation, he separated himself from the Presbytery of New York, and united with three other ministers, one of whom was the Rev. Jacob Green of Hanover, N. J., in forming an Independent Presbytery, called the Associated Presbytery of Morris County. The Body never grew in numbers, though it continued many years. In 1787, Mr. Lewis took charge of the Academy in North Salem, Westchester County, and at the same time became the acting Pastor of the Presbyterian Church there, though it is believed that he was never formally installed. He remained Principal of the Academy until about the beginning of 1795. On the 26th of December, of that year, he was installed as Pastor of the Congregational Church in North Stamford, Conn., where he died on the 5th of April, 1819, in the seventy-third year of his age. He published a pamphlet entitled "The Covenant interest of the children of believers illustrated and proved, and considered as a solid foundation for Infant Baptism. With an Appendix concerning the Discipline of baptized children," 1782; a Sermon preached at the ordination of Zechariah Greene to the pastoral charge of the Church at Cutchogue (so called) in Southold, 1787; a Sermon delivered at Gilead in Fredericktown, 1792. He prepared for publication an elaborate Treatise on the doctrine of the Trinity; another on the Prophecies of Daniel; and another on the Revelation of St. John. The Rev. Daniel Smith, says of him in his Funeral Sermon—"He possessed a strong and discriminating mind; maintained a high standing as a man and a scholar among his contemporaries in Yale College, * * * and has uniformly, through his ministerial life, maintained a high standing as a scholar and a theologian; but his most distinguishing excellence consisted in being an eminent Christian, a laborious, faithful, and in a good degree successful, minister of the Gospel."

‡ The Presbytery of New York was divided by the Synod of New York and New Jersey, in October, 1809; and the new Presbytery was known as the Presbytery of *Jersey*, and Mr. Armstrong, with the Church of Mendham, fell within its bounds.

were several of them members of the Newark Presbytery. Of this institution he continued the Principal till about a year previous to his death. After his removal to Bloomfield, he preached occasionally, though he had no stated charge.

Mr. Armstrong received the degree of Master of Arts from the College of New Jersey in 1804, and the degree of Doctor of Divinity from the same College, in 1821.

Dr. Armstrong, a short time before his death, removed with his family to Perth Amboy, N. J., where he spent his last days. In May, 1821, he had an attack of paralysis, from which he never fully recovered; and he had several attacks afterwards, each leaving him more feeble than the previous one. Towards the close of his life, his mind became seriously affected by his disease, and he lost that self-control which had always constituted one of his prominent characteristics; though he retained to the last a strong filial confidence in God. The Sabbath morning before his death, he called his children together, and, after committing them to the care of his Heavenly Father, soon lost the power of speech, and never afterwards recovered it. He died at Perth Amboy, on the 4th of March, 1827. His Funeral Sermon was preached by the Rev. G. N. Judd, then Pastor of the Church in Bloomfield, to which place his remains were taken for burial.

He was married in the year 1795, to Polly, daughter of Aaron and Sarah Dod, of Bloomfield,—of Puritan extraction. She died on the 13th of December, 1826, about three months previous to the death of her husband. They had ten children,—three sons and seven daughters. The sons were all graduated at the College of New Jersey. The eldest was the Rev. *William J. Armstrong*, D. D., a notice of whom will be found in another part of this work. The second, *Amzi Armstrong*, was a lawyer, and for a time a member of the Senate and of the Governor's Council in New Jersey. The third, the Rev. *George D. Armstrong*, D. D., was for fourteen years a Professor in Washington College, Va., and is now (1855) Pastor of the Presbyterian Church in Norfolk, Va.

Dr. Armstrong published two Sermons in the *New Jersey Preacher*, 1813; a Syllabus of Lectures on the visions of the Revelation, 1815; a Sermon entitled "the last Trumpet," 1823.

FROM THE REV. E. R. FAIRCHILD, D. D.

NEW YORK, February, 15, 1855.

My dear Sir: Although in my infancy I was baptized by the Rev. Dr. Richards of Morristown, N. J., in whose parish my parents then lived, the Rev. Dr. Amzi Armstrong, Pastor of the Presbyterian Church in Mendham of that State, was the earliest minister I remember to have seen.

Before I had reached my fourth year, my parents had removed from the Morristown Congregation, and settled within the bounds of Dr. Armstrong's charge. With the family I attended his ministrations on the Sabbath, and at other times, till the pastoral relation between him and his people was dissolved, in 1816, and he removed to Bloomfield. My father was early elected a ruling elder in his church, and thus an official and social intimacy sprung up and continued between him and our family, and I thus had many opportunities of seeing him and of becoming acquainted with his character.

In many respects Dr. Armstrong was a remarkable man, and would compare not unfavourably with the most prominent and gifted of his cotemporaries. In

person he was under the medium size. He was about five feet six inches high. His limbs were small; his chest and shoulders were somewhat broader, than is usual with persons of his stature. His head and face were well formed and well proportioned to his chest. His hair was straight, and of dark brown colour. His eyes were bright and piercing, and his countenance open, frank and intelligent. He was, however, unfortunately, a cripple from his infancy, and in consequence often suffered a great deal. He was rendered a cripple by his nurse, who, upon her dying bed, subsequent to his retirement from Mendham, revealed it to him. He was sent for in haste to visit an aged woman, who was about to die, but who declared she could not die in peace till she had seen him. He repaired to her residence. She was still living and able to speak to him. She told him she had called for him to reveal to him a secret, and to ask his forgiveness. He was surprised when he found the secret related to himself; but the woman proceeded to inform him that she nursed him when an infant, and, in a fit of impatience one day, threw him from her arms upon the floor with such violence that it brought on him his lameness, and all the attendant evils he had suffered from his childhood. Thus, for the first time, he learned exactly how, and by whose agency, his frame was shattered, and he subjected to such bodily infirmity and pain through his whole life. Of course he forgave the dying woman, and gave her suitable Christian counsel.

His right leg was shorter and smaller than the other, and very weak, so that he walked with great difficulty, even when aided by a cane. With advancing age, this infirmity grew upon him, and it was a principal cause of leading him to ask a release from the duties of his pastoral charge.

As a man, a citizen, a friend, and a pastor, Dr. Armstrong was very highly esteemed in his congregation. His perceptions of the relations, privileges, and rights of others, and of the proprieties of life, were delicate, quick and just; and his temperament and moral principles were such as led him to perform his various social duties in an easy and acceptable manner. He was of an uncommonly happy disposition. Though not justly liable to the charge of levity, there was an innocent mirthfulness which enlivened his intercourse, especially with his more intimate friends. A broad current of genuine wit, and a vein of keen sarcasm ran through his mental constitution, whose overflowings it was not always easy for him to repress; and his impulses to repartee made most who knew him deal cautiously in their approaches, which were likely to call him out in this direction. It was of rare occurrence that any who assailed him came off unscathed, or other than "second best" in the conflict.

His manners and bearing in society were familiar, courteous and gentlemanly. He knew how to mingle with his people with a graceful freedom that would seem to put all reserve away, and yet by that intercourse obtain and secure to himself higher respect and veneration than he had before.

As a pastor, he was much beloved and revered. Few have had such influence over their flocks as he had. He was regarded not merely as a thorough theologian and safe instructor in morals and evangelical religion, but as a wise and prudent counsellor in all the matters of ordinary life. Few understood human nature and the springs of action better than he, or could manage men more advantageously to the peace and happiness of society. Among his parishioners it was a commonly expressed opinion, (and it was derived to a good extent from things dropped by him, in his preaching and intercourse with them,) that he knew about all that was going on in every part of the parish. If the youth or others were occasionally engaged in any matter of doubtful propriety, some occurrence would sooner or later give some of the parties an impression that the pastor had heard of it.

In intellect, Dr. Armstrong was much above mediocrity; and as a preacher he was superior to most of his brethren. He early accustomed himself to

preach without his manuscript, and ultimately attained to great self-possession and power in that mode of preaching. He, however, did not lay aside writing, but cultivated the two habits of writing and extemporizing at the same time.

In the judicatories of the Church, he exerted great influence, and commanded high respect. He had a clear and well balanced mind, and a happy faculty of disentangling difficult and involved subjects. He usually imparted light whenever he spoke, from which acknowledged fact he was facetiously called "the snuffers of the Presbytery." I believe the foregoing hints and facts will cover the ground which your request contemplated. If they shall aid you in your work, I shall be happy in having furnished them.

Yours respectfully,

E. R. FAIRCHILD.

SAMUEL BLATCHFORD, D. D.*

1795—1828.

SAMUEL BLATCHFORD was a descendant of Major Blatchford who was at the battle of the Boyne, having gone from Holland to England with King William's army. He was the son of Henry and Mary Blatchford, and was born in the town of Plymouth Dock, now called Davenport, in the County of Devon, England, in the year 1767. His parents were both distinguished for piety: his father first became seriously impressed under the preaching of John Wesley, his mother under that of Rowland Hill. He was early devoted, in the purpose and wish of his parents, to the ministry of the sanctuary, and his studies were directed with reference to that end.

It was while he was yet a mere child that the war broke out that resulted in the American Revolution. Among those who ventured to espouse our country's cause in Great Britain, were young Blatchford's family connections, particularly his maternal uncle, the Rev. Rebert Heath. While the American prisoners were confined in Mill prison, these benevolent persons were assiduous in endeavouring to mitigate their sufferings by every means in their power; until at length an association was formed in London for the purpose, with several philanthropic noblemen at its head. The subject of this sketch was often employed to convey the means of relief to these tenants of the prison; and, as he became familiar with their sufferings, and interested in their fortunes, he formed the purpose, while he was yet in his boyhood, that, if his life should be spared, he would some day make his home in America.

Between the ages of seven and nine years, he experienced two signal instances of Divine goodness in the preservation of his life, when exposed to imminent danger. Of these merciful interpositions he has left the following account:—"I had been amusing myself nearly the whole of an afternoon by fishing from a boat which lay beside the dock, and was so much occupied by my employment that I did not perceive the falling of the tide. It fell, I think, about twelve or fourteen feet. It now became a question how to return, and I determined to clamber up by the help of the projecting

* MS. Autobiography from his son, Dr. T. W. Blatchford.