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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.

sider him to have been a model worthy of all imitation; and the results of his faithfulness appear in the consistent piety of each of his grown up children, and in the religious intelligence and conscientiousness of all of them.

He was very fond of music. He played well himself on the violin, and, in family worship, often accompanied the singing with that instrument. Sometimes a daughter accompanied the singing on the piano forte. All joined in that exercise; and one could not avoid feeling that the melody which they made, was melody in their hearts, unto the Lord.

Mr. Tinker was a fast and firm friend. Of this, I had a personal experience; and the volumes of his correspondence, maintained with various persons, through many years, with some from his young manhood to the day of his death, abundantly and strongly illustrate it. In this relation, he but exemplified the general steadiness and reliableness of his character.

Much might be added to the above; but what I have written is probably sufficient for your purpose.

I am, very truly and sincerely,

Your friend,

M. L. P. THOMPSON.



WILLIAM MAYO ATKINSON, D. D.*

1833—1849.

WILLIAM MAYO ATKINSON, the son of Robert and Mary (Mayo) Atkinson, was born at Powhatan, on James River, two miles below Richmond, Va., on the 22d of April, 1796. His father was of Quaker descent, and by his mother he was connected with some of the ancient and most respectable families of Virginia. He was the eldest of eleven children. His early years were distinguished by fondness for books, and by great gentleness, docility, and loveliness. At the age of sixteen, he entered the Junior class in the College of New Jersey, and graduated in 1814. He then returned to Virginia, studied Law under David Robertson of Petersburg, and in due time was admitted to the Bar. He settled in the practice of the Law at Petersburg, and continued in it until the year 1833. He was married on the 10th of July, 1821, to Rebecca Bassett Marsden, of Norfolk, Va.,—a lady of fine intellectual endowments and moral qualities.

In the summer of 1822, during a revival of religion at Petersburg, he became hopefully the subject of a spiritual renovation, and joined the Presbyterian Church then under the pastoral care of the Rev. B. H. Rice. Shortly after, he was chosen an elder in the Church, in which capacity he officiated for some time, with great fidelity, and to much acceptance. After some years,—during which much of his leisure was occupied in theological reading,—it became a question of duty with him whether he should not relinquish the profession of Law, and enter the ministry; and, though he saw that the proposed change must involve a great pecuniary sacrifice, he quickly resolved to make it, in obedience to what he believed to be the higher claims of the cause of Christ. Accordingly, after a few months of preparatory study, which was carried on principally in his Law office, he was

* MS. from his daughter.—Foote's Sketches of Va., 2d Series.

licensed to preach the Gospel by the East Hanover Presbytery, on the 17th of June, 1833. He was ordained as an Evangelist on the 26th of April, 1834.

Shortly after his licensure, he was appointed Agent of the Virginia Bible Society. In this capacity he travelled extensively in Virginia, and after a year or two, his field was enlarged so as to include several other of the Southern States. While thus employed, he was remarkably successful in raising funds, as well as in awakening a deeper and more extensive interest in the Bible cause. On resigning his Agency, he supplied vacancies, for a few years, in Chesterfield County, and in the vicinity of Petersburg. Towards the close of 1838, he received a call to settle as Pastor of the Presbyterian Church in Winchester, and, having accepted it, his installation took place on the first Sabbath in February, 1839.

The degree of Doctor of Divinity was conferred upon him by Jefferson College in 1843.

In August, 1844, his wife died, having been the mother of twelve children, only six of whom survived her. He remarked, as he stood gazing with deep emotion at her lifeless remains, that they had divided their children equally between them,—six having gone with her to a happier home, and six remaining with him on earth. In January, 1846, he was married, a second time,—to Betty J. White,—a granddaughter of Judge Robert White, long a resident of Winchester. By this marriage he had two children.

In the spring of 1846, believing that it would be for his greater usefulness, he resigned his pastoral charge, and accepted an Agency for the Board of Education of the Presbyterian Church. His labours in that cause were very great; and these, with the attendant exposures incident to travelling in the more unhealthy parts of the Western country, gradually undermined his naturally vigorous constitution, and brought him to his grave, when his friends and the Church were anticipating for him many years more of active usefulness. In the latter part of the year 1848, there were decisive indications that his lungs had become diseased; but he rallied sufficiently to preach once in December; and it proved to be the last time. Early in February, 1849, his disease took on a more aggravated form, and confined him to his bed; and, on the 24th of that month, in all the serenity of Christian faith and hope, he passed to his reward.

Dr. Atkinson published a Sermon delivered at the installation of the Rev. John M. P. Atkinson as Pastor of the Church at Warrenton, Fauquier County, Va., 1844. The last Sermon he ever preached, on the text,—“For here we have no continuing city, but we seek one to come,”—was also published.

FROM THE REV. CHARLES HODGE, D. D.

PRINCETON, August 21, 1857.

My dear Sir: Dr. William M. Atkinson was my Senior in the College of New Jersey. He took a high stand among his fellow-students. His talents and attainments commanded their respect, his amiability secured their affection, and his simplicity and humour made him a constant source of amusement. He was therefore an universal favourite. He had, at that period of his life, a very decided lisp, which rendered his conversation the more attractive and racy. He

was exemplary in his moral deportment, and although not a professor of religion, was the subject of very strong religious feelings. Before coming to College, he had in some way fallen under the influence of Romish views, and practised, unknown to those around him, a good deal of self-mortification. He told me he often would lie all night over the rounded tops of trunks in the most uneasy position as a penance. These religious feelings soon took a more scriptural direction, without losing their strength. He was a very influential member of the American Whig Society, (one of the literary institutions of the College,) and was the means of introducing into its library Doddridge's *Rise and Progress of Religion*, and other books of the same class, which to my knowledge were blessed to several of his fellow-students. This was about a year before the revival of 1815, which forms so interesting an epoch in the history of Princeton College, and was doubtless one of the instrumentalities blessed of God to that event. Of this Atkinson knew nothing, as he graduated in 1814.

After he left College, I did not meet with him for more than twenty years. I was a mere boy when we were fellow-students, and he had made a pet of me; but I took it for granted that he would forget me before a year was over. But Atkinson's heart never forgot. Every few years he would write to me, and renew his old associations and feelings. About the year 1834, or 1835, a large man entered my study and stood some time without speaking. At last he said,—“I see you don't know me.” His speech betrayed him, and I exclaimed “William M. Atkinson!” The twenty years were annihilated, and we were to each other as college boys again. From that time, and especially after he entered the ministry, I saw him frequently, and continued to regard him to the day of his death as one of my dearest friends. Others who knew him during his long practice at the Bar, can tell you of his standing in his profession. You ask me for my personal recollections and impressions, and to them I confine myself. He had a clear, strong mind, and excellent judgment. He was specially versed in English literature, and in the niceties of the English language, and was a great orthoepist. But his heart made him what he was. I certainly have never known a man freer from all the forms of pride and malice, or fuller of kind, generous and affectionate feelings. I never knew of his being angry; I never heard him utter an unkind or a disparaging word of any human being. He never forgot a friend, and I presume he never had an enemy. What he was in other aspects and relations, I had little opportunity of knowing, but as a friend and as a man, he was well nigh peerless.

Very truly your friend,

CHARLES HODGE.

FROM THE REV. WILLIAM S. PLUMER, D. D.

PROFESSOR IN THE WESTERN THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY.

ALLEGHANY, Pa., March 25, 1857.

Dear Brother: I think it was in the spring of 1829, that I first met with Mr. (afterwards Dr.) William M. Atkinson. He then resided in Petersburg, Va., and practised Law in the Courts of that town and of adjoining counties. He was also an elder in the Tobb Street Presbyterian Church of Petersburg. From the first, I was struck with his kindness and courtesy. Indeed, a serious doubt arose in my mind whether so extraordinary an interest in the welfare of others could be heartfelt. My subsequent knowledge of the man satisfied me that I never had known a more candid and sincere person. Like the widow's cruse of oil, his love increased by pouring out.

In October, 1830, I became Pastor of the Church in which he was an elder. From that period to his death, our relations were intimate, and to me exceed-

ingly pleasant. At that time there was felt to be a great want of ministers of the Gospel, especially in Virginia. In 1831, a conversation between us satisfied me that he was not without doubts respecting his personal duty. In the Law he had succeeded well, and had a fair prospect of rising to eminence. But he said, in substance,—“If I spend my life as a lawyer, I shall, at its close, be merely able to say, I have earned an honest livelihood in an honourable profession, and I leave my good name to my children. But in the ministry, all one’s energy is directed to the advancement of Christ’s glory, and he that reapeth receiveth wages and gathereth fruit unto eternal life.” Not long after this, the death of a lovely child taught him a new lesson respecting the vanity of earthly things. After much prayer, and a severe mental conflict, he began to wind up his professional affairs, and to pursue the necessary studies preparatory to the work of the ministry. So far as I could judge, I do not remember ever to have seen any one enter the sacred office in a more becoming temper and spirit. His whole subsequent life showed that he had laid his foundations deep in humility and trust in God; and I can truly say that I have never known a more laborious and devoted minister of the Gospel.

I have never met with a more amiable human being than Dr. Atkinson; and yet he was far removed from that easy good-nature which is as often mischievous as useful. I have seen him severely tried, but his sterling principles and his decision of character never failed him. His natural talents were very good. He possessed an unusual degree of common sense. His piety was remarkably humble, cheerful and gentle. Above most he was unselfish. He did not love to think or speak of himself. The death of a child, already noticed, occurred during a revival of religion. In Eastern Virginia it is usual to preach a Funeral Sermon on the occasion of every death. Fearing I might be led to some topic expressive of sympathy with his family, rather than to truths seasonable to the state of public feeling, he wrote, requesting me to preach on I. Tim. i. 15,—“This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance,” &c. Things of this sort characterized the man.

Dr. Atkinson was very fond of young people and children. Great numbers of such, besides his own kindred, regarded and treated him as a dear and honoured relative. He was truly catholic in all his principles and feelings towards God’s people of every name.

In stature he was above the average, and was of a full habit. He was somewhat near-sighted and wore glasses. In pronouncing some words he lisped considerably.

As a preacher, he was clear, judicious, instructive, and practical,—always animated, never overwhelming.

He was a very useful member of Church Courts, always studying the things which make for peace, as well as those which promote truth and order. I have not known a better presiding officer in a deliberative assembly.

I never lost a truer friend. Towards the dear ones of his own family who survive him, I cherish the tenderest affection.

Very truly yours,

WILLIAM S. PLUMER.

FROM THE RT. REV. THOMAS ATKINSON, D. D.

BISHOP OF THE DIOCESE OF NORTH CAROLINA.

WILMINGTON, June 15, 1857.

Rev. and dear Sir: You certainly ought not to think that you are asking more of me than I am bound to do, when you request my aid in framing a commemorative notice of my beloved brother. Indeed I feel that the obligation is on my side; for you are doing that for his memory which he well deserved, but which would have been left undone, had you not taken it in hand.

My brother, previous to his conversion, had always been an amiable and high-principled man, and was never what would be commonly considered immoral or dissipated; but being, at the time, a young lawyer of acknowledged talent, and rising in his profession, of a large connection by blood and alliance, of social temper, and of great personal popularity, he was in danger not only of being confirmed in worldliness of character and habits, but of becoming self-indulgent and careless, to an extent which the world itself would censure. But from the time that religion became to him an object of serious interest, it became the chief concern and the guiding principle of life. His profession, in which he was qualified to shine, and in which he did obtain considerable success, under the immense disadvantage of pursuing it with a heart alienated from it,—this profession he at once subordinated, and after some twelve years of struggle, entirely relinquished, in order that he might give himself absolutely to the service of his Redeemer. He was, I think, while a layman, considered, more than any other man of his time in that wide circle in which he was known, the representative of the Christian cause and of Christian principle. And I am well persuaded that he would have received many more votes than any other, if the question had come to be decided by the popular voice,—not who should be member of Congress or Governor, but who was the best man, and who the most zealously affected in every good cause in all that region of country in which he lived. On some important subjects he had views very opposite to those current around him, and he expressed them with great decision and plainness; but such was the charm of his character, such the winning effect of his own benevolence, and charity in judgment, that men might thoroughly differ from him on important practical questions, and yet never cease to love him and trust him. Indeed it was observable that some of his most intimate personal friends were thus his opposites in opinion. This very superiority, however, in his moral and spiritual character, detracted, I believe, from his reputation for intellectual ability. It was impossible to converse with him for a quarter of an hour, without perceiving that he was a man of unusual intelligence and fulness of knowledge; but persons inferior to him in these respects, had, with many, a higher estimation, because, on other grounds, they had no claim, or a lower claim, to admiration. There is a jealousy in human nature which makes us unwilling to believe in the union in one character of many distinct excellencies. We grow tired of hearing of the justice of Aristides, and we revenge ourselves on him by ostracising him in one form or other. If a man be a Webster or a Clay, we seek satisfaction on him for his intellectual superiority by dwelling on his moral infirmities: if he be a Washington or a Wilberforce, we take shelter from the painful brightness of his character, by denying the extent or the splendour of his intellect. And so in the more ordinary spheres of life—a man's acquaintance will not tolerate his being very much their superior in all things. If they allow him sense, they make some deductions from his goodness, and if he be conspicuously good, then he could hardly have been very great. Time indeed rectifies much of this injustice with those whose names become historical; but, such seems to be the first reception that man meets from man. My brother was, I think, and was generally considered, remarkable for the purity of his motives, his high sense of justice, the compass and the warmth of his benevolence, and the fervour of his piety. But to me he seemed also remarkable for the originality of his views, his acuteness of thought, the variety and appositeness of the analogies that he saw, the tenacity of his memory, and perhaps, above all, the soundness of his judgment. There have been very few men within the circle of my observation more consulted than he was, and very few whose opinions were more implicitly followed. At the same time, he was as remote as possible from a desire to urge his opinions upon others, or from prejudice against those who disagreed with him. I was, by eleven or twelve years, the younger brother, and he had been my

guardian; yet, while he was in connection, and in affection, thoroughly a Presbyterian, my own views caused me to adhere to the Episcopal Church, into which we had both been baptized, and to adopt such principles concerning it, as caused me to be classed with High Churchmen. But, meeting frequently as we did, and conversing unreservedly, I do not remember a word passing between us which was inconsistent with the most cordial fraternal affection. On that subject, his brothers and sisters were about equally divided; but none, I believe, ever felt that this difference at all influenced their love and veneration for him, or his tender affection for them.

His sermons would, I am inclined to think, hardly sustain the representation I make of his intellectual superiority. He entered on the ministry in middle life, when his habits of thought and speech had been formed. He had great facility in extemporaneous discourse, and some prejudice against written sermons. *His*, therefore, were very rarely written, and not even much premeditated; and while always sensible, instructive, earnest, and sometimes glowing, and sometimes pathetic, yet did not exhibit generally the terseness, the vigour, and the felicitous diction, which the written compositions of so rich and cultivated a mind would have displayed.

Nowhere did he appear to greater advantage than in the family circle. If he had any fault as a husband, it was in the excess of his conjugal affection. As a father, it would be difficult to suggest in what he failed. Never were children more tenderly dealt with, yet never was more implicit obedience rendered by children. Yet with so much to admire and love in him, he felt himself an unworthy sinner, and died relying (to use his own words) on Christ—his Cross—his Covenant. One certainly, that he left behind, felt that the earth was darker to him for the rest of life.

Faithfully yours,

THOMAS ATKINSON.

JOHN A. GRETTER.*

1833—1853.

JOHN A. GRETTER, the son of Michael and Joanna Gretter, was born in Richmond, Va., on the 28th of September, 1810. He pursued his studies preparatory to entering College, in his native city, and in January, 1827, was matriculated in the University of Virginia, where he remained till he was graduated in July, 1829. In February, 1831, he went to Huntsville, Ala., and took charge of the mathematical department in Mr. Crawford's school. Here he remained till July of that year, when he returned to Richmond to visit his friends, with the expectation of going back to Huntsville, and becoming Principal of the school in which he had been engaged. But a change now passed upon his character, that involved a corresponding change of his plans and purposes, and gave a new complexion to his life. He embraced religion as a practical principle, and henceforth gave evidence of living under its power.

In August, 1831, he was married to Mary Wynn, of Charlottesville, Va.; and in October, 1831, they both connected themselves, at the same time,

* MS. from Mrs. Gretter.