

MEMOIR OF PRESIDENT DAVIES.

BY

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[from 1864AD edition of Samuel Davies' "Sermon's" in 2 volumes.]

SAMUEL DAVIES was born near Summit Ridge, in the county of Newcastle, Delaware, on the 3^d of November, 1723. Both his parents were of Welsh extraction. His father was a farmer of very simple habits, of great integrity, and of well accredited Christian character. His mother was distinguished not only for fine intellectual endowments, but for deep spirituality and intense devotion to the cause of Christ; and this son is said to have been given her in answer to special prayer, in token of which she named him Samuel, as she solemnly devoted him to the Lord. The father died two years before the son; the mother survived him for a long period, and was an inmate of the family of the Rev. Dr. John Rodgers, of New York.

This child, thus dedicated in his infancy to the service of Christ and his Church, by parental faith, was early cared for, in all his intellectual, moral, and spiritual interests, in the best manner that the circumstances permitted. As there was no school in the neighbourhood, he received the rudiments of his education under the teaching of his mother; and though, during the years of his early boyhood, he evinced the usual vivacity and sprightliness incident to that period, he was, by no means, unaffected by his mother's pious counsels and instructions. At the age of ten, he was sent to an English school, at some distance from home, where he remained two years; and during this period made rapid progress in his studies, though at the expense of losing, in a measure, the religious impressions which a mother's watchful and devoted attentions had made upon him. He, however, still continued the habit of secret prayer, and, cherished the purpose of devoting himself to the Christian ministry. At the age of twelve, his impressions were greatly revived and strengthened, and there is reason to believe that, at this time, if not before, he became a subject of renewing grace. He did not, however, make a public profession of his faith until he had reached his fifteenth year. The subject of religion now became with him all-engrossing: while he enjoyed, in a high degree, the comforts of a good hope through grace, he scrutinized the motives and principles of his own conduct with the utmost care, and met the temptations of the world with an heroic resistance that would not have dishonoured the most advanced Christian.

Having the ministry now distinctly in his eye, he prosecuted his studies with renewed vigour, and made rapid progress in every department of knowledge to which he directed his attention. He commenced his classical course under the instruction of the Rev. Abel Morgan, a highly respectable Welsh minister, of the Baptist denomination; but when the Rev. Samuel Blair opened his famous school at Fagg's Manor, Chester county, Pa., he was transferred to that school, where he remained till both his classical and theological education was completed. The instruction here was most thorough, and the religious atmosphere most healthful; so that while young Davies was making rapid improvement in the various branches of human learning, as well as becoming a proficient in speculative theology, he was also steadily growing in grace, and rising into a

nearer conformity to that Master to whom he had devoted himself. So intense was his application to study that, by the time his course in the institution was completed, his health, which was at best frail, had become quite seriously impaired. Having sustained his several preparatory trials in a most creditable manner, he was licensed to preach the Gospel, by the Presbytery of Newcastle, on the 30th of July, 1746. On the 23^d of October following, he was married to Sarah Kirkpatrick.

On the 19th of February, 1747, he was ordained as an Evangelist, with a view to his visiting certain congregations in Hanover county, Va., whence he had received aid in his preparatory studies. His mission into that region was regarded as one of great delicacy and difficulty, especially in view of the fact that civil suits had already been instituted, and were then pending, against several clergymen, for holding religious worship in a manner not sanctioned by the laws of the Province; a matter in relation to which the public mind was then deeply agitated. Mr. Davies hesitated, partly on account of his inexperience in the ministry, and his want of familiarity with ecclesiastical rules and usages, and partly on account of his feeble health, to undertake the mission; but the remarkable powers he had developed, in connection with the very decidedly favourable impression which his preaching had made while he was a probationer, seemed to point him out as better fitted than any one else to occupy that difficult field.

In due time, Mr. Davies set out for Virginia, and, before going to his appointed field of labour, repaired to Williamsburg, to obtain from the General Court a license to officiate at four meeting-houses in and about Hanover. The Governor favoured the application, and, through his influence, the following license was obtained from the General Court, dated April 14, 1767:—

“On the petition of Samuel Davies, a Dissenting minister, who, this day, in Court, took the usual oaths to His Majesty’s person and government, and subscribed the Test, and likewise publicly declared his assent thereunto, he is allowed to assemble and meet any congregations of Dissenters at the several meeting-houses on the lands of Samuel Morris, David Rice, and Stephen Leacy, in Hanover County, and on the lands of Thomas Watkins, in Henrico County, without molestation, they behaving in a peaceable manner, and conforming themselves according to the directions of the Acts of Parliament in that behalf made.”

While the trials of those who had been prosecuted for worshipping God contrary to law were still in progress, Mr. Davies proceeded to Hanover with his license in his pocket; and when the people knew under what circumstances he had come to them, they were ready to welcome him as an angel of mercy. His preaching was listened to on every side with profound attention and admiration; combining, as it did, the highest graces of rhetoric and elocution with the most luminous, simple, and forcible exhibition of divine truth. He laboured in Hanover and several adjacent counties not far from four months; and wherever he preached, a desire was expressed that his labours might be permanently secured. When the allotted time for his mission had expired, he returned to his friends at the North, but not till he had received the most importunate requests to come back and make Virginia his home. Indeed, he had no sooner taken his leave of them, than they made out a regular call for him, and sent it to the Presbytery.

Scarcely had he returned to Delaware, when he met with a sore affliction in the sudden death of his wife. The shock materially affected his health; his hec-

tic tendencies, which had before developed themselves to some extent, now became more decided; and he was fully impressed with the conviction that the time of his departure was at hand. But this only seemed to quicken his zeal to labour to the utmost while the day should last; and hence, after preaching in the day-time, he would sometimes at night find himself with a burning fever which would bring on delirium, requiring one or more persons to sit up with him. Being unable to take charge of a congregation while in this feeble state, he travelled, as he was able, from one vacancy to another, preaching to the extent of his ability, and rendering himself everywhere an object of the highest interest. In the spring of 1748, there was considerable alleviation of his malady, though he himself regarded it as only temporary, and fully expected that the disease would have a fatal termination. Many earnest applications were made for his pastoral services; and the call from Virginia was renewed, signed by about one hundred and fifty heads of families, and urged with great importunity by the person who was appointed to present it. Of his own feelings in view of this call, he has left the following record:—"Upon the arrival of a messenger from Hanover, I put my life in my hand, and determined to accept their call, hoping I might live to prepare the way for some more useful successor, and willing to expire under the fatigues of duty, rather than in voluntary negligence." No man could have been better fitted than he to occupy the field to which he was now called. While the people were suffering manifold difficulties from the enforcement of the unrighteous laws of the Province, in the form of indictments, fines and costs of Court, the ears of many of them were open to receive the truth from his lips; and he, in turn, feeling that his time for active service was short, and that the demand for evangelical labour in the region around him was most urgent, addressed himself to his work with a strength of purpose and a simple dependence on Divine aid, that gave a mighty power to his ministrations.

On this, his second journey to Virginia, Mr. Davies was accompanied by his friend, the Rev. John Rodgers, (afterwards Dr. Rodgers, of New York,) who had been a fellow-student with him, under the Rev. Samuel Blair, at Fagg's Manor. They had become strongly attached to each other during the period of their education, and, under the same influences, had imbibed, in a high degree, the same spirit—both were glowing with love to the Saviour and the cause for which he died. It was at Mr. Davies' earnest request that the Presbytery appointed Mr. Rodgers to perform a few months' missionary labour in Virginia that thus these two might become, for the time, not only companions, but fellow-helpers. They commenced their journey to Virginia, in April, 1748, and went directly to Hanover, when, after passing a Sabbath, and each of them preaching a sermon, they proceeded to Williamsburg, to procure for Mr. Rodgers a license to preach in the Province. In this, however, they were unsuccessful; for though the Governor (Gooch) strongly favoured the application, and did his utmost to have the license granted, the decision of the majority of the Council was adverse to it, and thus the young missionary was obliged to look out for another field of labour. Accordingly, before the close of May, he had taken leave of his friend Davies, crossed the Chesapeake Bay, and, after stopping for a while on the eastern shore of Maryland, finally settled as pastor of the church of St. George's, in Delaware.

The high motives which controlled Mr. Davies in the selection of his field of labour may be inferred from the following extract from a letter addressed

by him to the Bishop of London, in whose diocese Virginia was reckoned, under date of January 10, 1752, nearly four years after his ministry in Hanover commenced:—

“I solemnly assure your Lordship that it was not the secret thirst of filthy lucre, nor the prospect of any other personal advantage, that induced me to settle here in Virginia. For sundry congregations in Pennsylvania, my native country, and in other Northern colonies, most earnestly importuned me to settle among them; where I should have had at least an equal temporal maintenance, incomparably more ease, leisure, and peace, and the happiness of the frequent society of my brethren; and where I should never have made a great noise or bustle in the world, but concealed myself in the crowd of my superior brethren, and spent my life in some little service for God and his Church in some peaceful corner, which would have been most becoming so insignificant a creature, and more agreeable to my recluse natural temper. But all these strong inducements were overweighed by a sense of the necessities of the Dissenters, as they lay two or three hundred miles distant from the nearest minister of their own denomination, and laboured under peculiar embarrassments for the want of a settled ministry.”

In the summer of 1748, Mr. Davies' preaching attracted great attention, and many more demands were made for his public services than he was able to meet. In order to avoid all collisions with the public authorities, who were resolutely determined to execute the laws in favour of the English Church, various petitions were presented to the General Court for an increased number of authorized houses of worship. Accordingly, three additional places of preaching were licensed, thus making seven in all, namely, three in Hanover, one in Henrico, one in Goochland, one in Louisa, and one in Caroline county. Of these he says in his letter to the Bishop of London:—“The nearest are twelve or fifteen miles apart, and many of the people have ten, fifteen, or twenty miles to the nearest, and thirty, forty, or sixty miles to the rest; nay, some of them have thirty or forty miles to the nearest.”

On the 4th of October, 1748, Mr. Davies formed a second matrimonial connection with Miss Jane Holt, of Hanover. She was a lady of great excellence, became the mother of six children, and survived her husband many years. His residence at this time was about twelve miles from Richmond, in the neighbourhood of the meeting-house near what is known as “Morris' Reading House.” The edifice, which accommodated about five hundred people, was quite too small for the multitude that thronged to hear him preach; the consequence of which was that they were obliged often to hold their services in an adjoining forest.

Though Mr. Davies had little difficulty in getting the sanction of the public authorities to his occupying so wide a field of labour, he was subsequently brought into collision with Peyton Randolph, the King's Attorney General, on the question whether the Act of Toleration, which had been passed in England expressly for the relief of Protestant Dissenters, extended also to Virginia. That this was the design of the Act, he maintained, in the presence of the General Court, with such force of argument and eloquence, as to awaken the admiration even of those who were most hostile to the position he defended; and it was no small gratification to him, on his subsequent visit to England, to have his own views on this subject fully endorsed by the King in Council.

Mr. Davies, besides occupying seven different places for preaching, and taking frequent journeys to attend the judicatories of the Church, made many missionary excursions in the parts of the country now forming the counties of Cumberland, Powhatan, Prince Edward, Charlotte, Campbell, Nottoway, and

Amelia. In performing these circuits, he was accustomed either to preach at the places where he lodged, or to address the family and servants in respect to their immortal interests, at evening worship. These services were often attended with a special blessing; and each successive tour that he made, brought some new requests for Presbyterian preaching. He was also deeply concerned for the spiritual interests of the coloured people, labouring among them with the utmost condescension and faithfulness, and bringing not a few of them to the acknowledgment and obedience of the truth. And, to crown all, he not only laboured earnestly to supply the vacancies around him with ministers from the Northern Presbyteries, but inaugurated a system of measures for providing ministers for Virginia from among her own youth. He did not, however, desire that their education should be completed under his own direction, but encouraged them ultimately to seek the higher advantages which were furnished by the College of New Jersey.

As early as September, 1751, a petition was presented to the Synod of New York by the Trustees of the College of New Jersey, that the Rev. Ebenezer Pemberton, of New York, might be commissioned to visit Great Britain with a view to solicit donations in behalf of the then infant College. A committee was appointed to confer with Mr. Pemberton on the subject; but he persistently declined to listen to their proposals. The next year, by direction of Synod, collections were taken for the object in different congregations within their bounds, but the result was not, by any means, adequate to the exigency; in consequence of which, in the next following year, the plan of sending a commission abroad was resumed by the Synod, and Messrs. Gilbert Tennent and Samuel Davies were designated to this service.

The necessary preparations for the voyage having been made, these two brethren embarked in a vessel, bound to London, on the 7th of November, 1753, and were safely landed at the place of their destination on the 25th of December following. The two kept together until they had reached Edinburg; but there they parted,—Mr. Tennent to visit Glasgow, and then pass into Ireland;—Mr. Davies to visit the principal cities and towns in England. After having accomplished the object of their mission, they met again in London, in October, 1754. The next month Mr. Tennent sailed for Philadelphia, and Mr. Davies for York, in Virginia, where, after a protracted and unpleasant voyage, he arrived on the 13th of February, 1755.

This mission was probably the most successful and the most important ever made from the colonies to the mother country. A much larger sum of money was contributed than the most sanguine had ventured to hope for; in addition to which a large measure of public sympathy was awakened in behalf of the Dissenters in Virginia, as well as a greatly increased interest for the Christianizing of the American Indians. Mr. Davies everywhere commanded the highest respect, not only for his great powers of pulpit eloquence, in which he was justly considered as well nigh unrivalled, but for his fine social qualities and eminent Christian character. His manuscript journal, which he kept during this period, was preserved in two volumes, which, by some means, were separated from each other, the one having found its place of deposit in the library of the Union Theological Seminary, in Virginia, the other in the library of Princeton College,—both, however, have been published by Dr. Foot, in his “Sketches of Virginia.” From this journal it appears that Mr. Davies made the acquaintance of a large part of the more distinguished of the English Dissenting clergy,

and his observations upon them—of course the result of a brief acquaintance—are in remarkable harmony with the united testimony of tradition and history concerning them.

The following anecdote in connection with President Davies' visit to London has appeared in a memoir of his life, prefixed to one of the editions of his sermons, and has been republished in several newspapers:—

So great was his fame in London as an eloquent preacher, that certain noblemen who had heard him, spoke of him as one of the wonders of the day, in the presence of George II.; whereupon the King directed his chaplain to invite Davis to preach in his chapel. The invitation being given and accepted, the American minister, in due time appeared and preached before a splendid audience, consisting of the royal family and many of the nobility. While the sermon was being delivered, the preacher observed the King frequently whispering to those who sat near him, causing them to smile. Davies, by way of rebuking this irreverent behaviour, frowned and looked sternly towards the King, and then proceeded with his discourse. The offense was very soon repeated; whereupon the American Dissenter exclaimed,—“When the lion roars, all the beasts of the forest tremble: when King Jesus speaks, the kings of the earth should keep silent.” The King bowed courteously, and remained silent till the service was closed. It afterwards appeared that the apparent disrespect of the King was the result of his high admiration of the eloquence to which he was listening;—that he was so much delighted that he could not avoid expressing his high gratification to those who were near him. The result was that the King sent for Davies to visit him; that they had several interesting interviews; and that His Majesty, as an evidence of his regard, made a liberal donation to the college.

The Rev. Dr. Carnahan, late President of the College of New Jersey, in a communication made to the New Jersey Historical Society, in 1848, proves conclusively that this story must be apocryphal; first, from the fact that in a most minute journal which Davies kept of this tour, descending to the details of each day's experience, (which is still extant,) there is no allusion to any one of the alleged facts which the anecdote includes; and secondly, from the fact that Dr. Gibbons and Dr. Finley, and Mr. Bostwick, and all the other of his contemporaries who have written concerning him, are entirely silent in respect to any such occurrence—an omission which can hardly be supposed if so striking an event had really taken place. The story is believed to have been originated by an agent employed in the Southern States, half a century ago, in selling an edition of Davies' sermons.

Mr. Davies, on his return to his people, found them and the whole country in the midst of the most violent agitation, occasioned by the French and Indian war. On the 10th of July, 1755, occurred Braddock's remarkable defeat, when the brave young Colonel Washington won for himself such imperishable laurels by saving the remnant of the army; and on the 20th of the same month, Mr. Davies preached a sermon in Hanover, on the words—“And in that day did the Lord God of hosts call to weeping, and to mourning, and to baldness, and to girding with sackcloth; and behold joy and gladness, slaying oxen and killing sheep, eating flesh and drinking wine: let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we shall die.” (Isa. xxii. 12, 13, 14.)¹ In this sermon he showed the highest type of patriotism in connection with the most earnest and glowing piety, and called upon his hearers, in a strain of fervid eloquence, from a regard to their interests as men, Britons, and Christians, to make a noble stand against the cruel invasion. Serious apprehensions were entertained that the negroes would become the allies of the French and Indians, and Mr. Davies, whose influence with the blacks was probably greater than that of any other person, exerted himself to the utmost to prevent such a coalition. On the 17th

of August of the same year, he preached another thrilling sermon suited to the times, to the first volunteer company raised in Virginia, after Braddock's defeat, on 2 Samuel x. 12: "Be of good courage, and let us play the men for our people, and for the cities of our God; and the Lord do that which seemeth him good."² In a note to this eloquent discourse occurs this remarkable, and, as it proved, truly prophetic sentence—"I may point out to the public that heroic youth, Colonel Washington, whom I cannot but hope Providence has hitherto preserved in so signal a manner, for some important service." In May, 1758, he preached another war sermon, on occasion of raising a company of volunteers for Captain Meredith; and the effect of the following passage is said to have been quite overwhelming:—"May I not reasonably insist upon it that the company be made up this very day before we leave this place. Methinks your King, your country, nay, your own interests, command me; and therefore I insist upon it. Oh, for the all-pervading force of Demosthenes' oratory—but I recall my wish, that I may correct it—oh, for the influence of the Lord of armies, the God of battles, the Author of true courage and every heroic virtue, to fire you into patriots and true soldiers this moment Ye young and hardy men, whose very faces seem to speak that God and nature formed you for soldiers, who are free from the encumbrance of families depending upon you for subsistence, and who are perhaps but of little service to society while at home, may I not speak for you and declare at your mouth—here we are, all ready to abandon our ease, and rush into the glorious dangers of the field, in defence of our country? Ye that love your country, enlist; for honour will follow you in life or death in such a cause. You that love your religion, enlist; for your religion is in danger. Can Protestant Christianity expect quarters from heathen savages and French papists? Sure, in such an alliance the powers of hell make a third party. Ye that love your friends and relations, enlist; lest ye ' see them enslaved and butchered before your eyes." Such was the effect of the discourse that, within a few minutes after its delivery, the company was made up; and even more offered their services than the captain was authorized to accept.³

But while Mr. Davies was so intensely interested for the cause of his country, and stood ready to identify himself with every effort for the vigorous prosecution of the war in defence of both their civil and Christian rights, his zeal for the spiritual welfare of his own flock never even seemed to wane; not only was he intent on preaching the Gospel within his own immediate sphere, which was very extended, but he was prompt to obey any summons that should carry him abroad, and had more to do with the formation of new churches and the settlement of ministers over them, than any other minister in the colony. Indeed he was, by universal consent, the master spirit of the Presbyterian Church throughout that region; and probably in no part of the Church was there another minister who combined so many elements of a controlling and well-nigh irresistible influence.

But the time had now come when Mr. Davies was to be called to another, and in some respects a more prominent position. On the 16th of August, 1758, he was chosen to succeed Jonathan Edwards as President of the College of New Jersey. The question of his removal was immediately submitted to the Presbytery of Hanover, and was decided in the negative. A letter which he addressed to the Trustees of the College, dated October 17, 1758, contains a decided answer to a renewed request from Princeton, and shows an earnest wish

to have the whole subject dismissed. Though the communication is somewhat long, I think proper to introduce it in this connection, partly because I am not aware that it has ever been published, and partly because it brings out very impressively some of the prominent features in Mr. Davies' character. The letter is as follows:—

“GENTLEMEN:

I encouraged myself and my friends in Virginia, that my last answer, and the judgment of the Presbytery, would have been received as a final decision; and that my perplexities would have no more been renewed by another application. And if, from my warm declaration of my zeal “to serve the college,” my candid friend, Mr. Smith, inferred, and therefore reported to you, that I thought my way clear to serve it in the character of a President, either the incautious and vague form of expressing myself, or the generous partiality of his friendship for me, tempted him to put a construction upon my words that I by no means intended. I assure you, gentlemen, I do not desire the compliment of repeated entreaties to accept the honour the Trustees have been pleased to confer upon me; but my hesitation, my delays and anxious inquiries, have been entirely owing to my sincere desire to discover my duty, and secure the approbation of my conscience in accepting or rejecting the proposal: and in this view, I hope the Trustees will excuse, or at least forgive me the trouble I have involuntarily occasioned them, which affords me more concern, I dare say, than to any of them.

Upon Mr. Halsey's unexpected arrival, I sent to consult those members of Presbytery who had formed the former judgment; and I also made such inquiries of him, as I thought necessary to give me a fair and full view of the matter, and constrained him to be unreserved and open-hearted. I have already received the answer of two leading members of the Presbytery; and as I expect that those of the rest will generally coincide with theirs; and as I am called abroad and may not have leisure to write, when that comes to hand; I venture to send you my final answer now, founded upon the best intelligence I can receive. And as I have honestly endeavoured to discover my duty, with all the impartiality and integrity I am capable of, I am encouraged to hope, a gracious God will not suffer me to mistake it; and therefore my former anxieties are subsided, and my mind has recovered that sacred calm which is the attendant of a full conviction.

My final answer then is, that in present circumstances, my way is not at all clear to accept the presidentship, or even to serve in that character *pro tempore* till the Synod; and therefore I desire the Trustees would proceed to the choice of another, and have no more dependence upon me.

As this answer, gentlemen, may be somewhat unexpected, and as I give it in more decisive terms than I could safely use in my former, you may justly demand the reasons of it; and they are such as these.

Though, to my great surprise, my reverend brethren and other friends in Virginia, have no objections to the offer upon the footing of my insufficiency, which is one of my chief objections; yet, they apprehend I am of so much importance in my present situation, to the interests of religion, and the liberty and honour of the Dissenters of this colony, so exposed to the oppression of high-flyers, by the influence I have somehow acquired with the great men here, and my correspondence in Great Britain, that I can by no means be spared from Virginia; and that the injury would be so great and irreparable here, that, if the College should even suffer by my non-compliance, it would be the lesser evil, and consequently rather to be chosen. It is with an ill grace these extravagant panegyrics upon myself come from my pen: but I transcribe them in the most modest language from their letters; and I cannot avoid it if I would give you a full view of the case.

But here I must be so impartial as to add, that the Presbytery would acquiesce in my judgment, even if I should determine to remove, and have desired me to judge for myself. But I put more confidence in their judgment than my own, in so dubious a case; and can by no means venture in opposition to it, though they give it with diffidence and hesitation.

Another reason of my refusal is, that the vote for me was not at all unanimous, and carried but by a very small majority; that sundry of the Trustees, who are good judges of merit, and well acquainted with me, look upon me as unfit for the place; and I am not capable of such gross self-flattery, as to dissent from them in this; nor do I make the estimate they form of me, the standard of their worth or of my affection for them. I cannot bear the thought of thrusting myself in, though by a fair and honourable election, in opposition to gentlemen whom I do

highly revere, and cannot bear to offend: and as I am a lover of peace, and never was formed to be a fire-brand of contention, I cannot offer such violence to myself, nor do the college so great an injury, as to enter as an incendiary, to cast it into a conflagration, which could not be easily quenched, and which would soon melt away my tender, unmanly spirit. I have good authority, I think, for this, from speaking circumstances, or authentic information; but I beg you would not suspect Mr. Halsey has betrayed his trust; or that any one of the Trustees has wrote to dissuade me. Mr. Halsey has acquitted himself like an honest man; and the college is obliged to him for a faithful, artless representation. Not one of the Trustees that voted against me has either directly or indirectly, as far as I know, wrote to me, or any one in Virginia, to throw any obstacle in my way. But I have credible, well-informed correspondents, that do not belong to your honourable Board, in whom I can place the utmost confidence, and when the case is so intricate, that I have hardly any judgment of my own, I think it my duty even implicitly to act upon that of others.

But the principal reason of my refusal is, that as, from a very thorough and long acquaintance with my worthy rival, Mr. Finley, I believe, in my conscience, without the least ostentatious affectation of humility, he is incomparably better qualified for the place than I am, or ever expect to be. I cannot bear the thought of thrusting myself into the seat, to the exclusion of him who, I am persuaded, will fill it with dignity, and to the universal satisfaction of all candid judges of real worth, when fully tried and known. And whenever I have had any thought of accepting the invitation, it has always been upon the supposition that the Trustees to whom I have no right or inclination to prescribe, would not in general, think as I do; and, consequently that he would not be chosen, even if I should refuse. But as it now appears to me, there is at least a great probability that Mr. Finley will be chosen, I think myself bound in conscience to give up my election in his favour; and with all the force of persuasion and entreaty I can use to transfer to him whatever interest I may have obtained among the Trustees by the generous excess of their charity.

If my officiating in the college as Vice President for some months would be of any service to it, I would cheerfully comply, notwithstanding the mutual bereavement I and my helpless family would suffer by it. But since the way is not clear for my accepting the place as stated President; since the judgment of the Presbytery lies in my way; and it is not unlikely the Synod would confirm their judgment; I apprehend it would answer no valuable end. But, on the other hand, it might be productive of sundry bad consequences; particularly, it would keep the college still longer in an unsettled state; and tempt some to suspect I have an eager ambition to accept the place; and I could give no umbrage for such a prodigious mistake.

I may venture to refer you to my honest and learned friend, Mr. Halsey, as well as to your former messenger, to attest the caution and impartiality with which I have proceeded in the whole matter. And could I communicate for a moment the sensations of my mind into yours, you would never impute my refusal to the want of affectionate zeal and concern for the College, or an ungrateful contempt or insensibility of the immerited honour the Trustees have done me.

I beg you would make my most dutiful compliments acceptable to His Excellency your Governor, for whom I have a very high veneration as a patron of virtue, liberty, and learning. I congratulate you and the College on the happiness of being under his administration, and pray God long to continue the blessing.

I present my affectionate compliments also to the whole Board of Trustees promiscuously, whether my electors or not. I am obliged to the former for their friendship for me: and I must value the latter for their better judgment in this instance, and the prevalence of public spirit over private friendship.

With a heart full of gratitude and love to you in particular, I am., gentlemen,

Your most obliged and most humble servant,

SAM'L DAVIES.

HANOVER, Oct. 18, 1758.

So deeply were the Trustees of the College impressed with the idea that Mr. Davies was the man for the place above any other within their reach, that notwithstanding the above letter, and the adverse decision of Presbytery already rendered, they brought the subject before the Synod of New York and Philadelphia, at its meeting in May, 1759, earnestly requesting that he might be liberated from his pastoral charge, with a view to being placed at the head of the

College. Though this application met with a strong remonstrance from his congregation, so deeply was the Synod impressed with a sense of the importance of the institution, and of his rare qualifications for the presidential chair, that they reached the conclusion that the best interests of the church required that he should be transferred to Princeton; and, accordingly, his pastoral relation was dissolved. He deferred to the judgment of Synod in the matter, and preached his farewell sermon on the 1st of July following, from 2 Cor. xiii. 11. "Finally, brethren, farewell," &c.⁴ In this sermon, while he expresses the warmest regard for his people, and the deepest sorrow at the thought of being separated from them, he details the circumstances which had shut him up to the conviction that the providence of God favoured his removal.

Mr. Davies immediately repaired to Princeton, and entered upon his official duties on the 26th of July; though he was not formally inaugurated as President of the College until the 26th of September. From the commencement of his labours here, it was not easy to fix a limit to his zeal, or his efforts for promoting the best interests of the College. And his success was what might have been expected from his ability and his industry. The friends of the College, in both Europe and America, watched all his benevolent and efficient movements in connection with the institution with the greatest interest; not doubting that, under his mild, judicious, energetic control, it was destined to reach a much higher point of honourable usefulness than it had done even under his illustrious predecessors.

But the bright hopes of his friends, of the College, and of the Church at large, were destined to an early disappointment. On the first of January, 1761, he preached a New Year's sermon in the college chapel, from the words,— "This year thou shalt die;" and on the 4th of February following, his text was verified in its application to himself. He had taken a violent cold, for which he was bled on Saturday, though he was occupied during the day, in transcribing for the press his sermon on the death of King George II.⁵ On the Sabbath following, he preached twice in the College chapel. On Monday morning, while sitting at the breakfast table, he was seized with chills, followed by an inflammatory fever, affecting his brain. While his faculties were continued to him, his mind was composed, and the future evidently opened upon him in a field of glory; and during the wanderings incident to his disease, he was constantly occupied in endeavouring to devise plans for doing good. His death was every way worthy of his life. An affectionate tribute was paid to his memory by Dr. Finley, his successor, in a sermon preached on occasion of his death, from Rom xiv. 7, 8, and printed by request of the Trustees of the College.⁶ The Rev. David Bostwick, of New York, one of Mr. Davies' most intimate friends, had been intrusted by him with the superintendence of the printing of the sermon on the death of George II., and he accompanied it with a preface, not only commendatory of the sermon, but highly eulogistic of the writer.⁷ Dr. Thomas Gibbons, of London, who had been for several years his correspondent, and who made the selection of his sermons for publication, preached a commemorative sermon, which he published in connection with that of Dr. Finley, in the first volume of the sermons of his deceased friend.⁸

The following is a list of President Davies' publications:—A Sermon on Man's Primitive State, 1748. The State of Religion among the Protestant Dissenters in Virginia, in a letter to the Rev. Joseph Bellamy, 1751. A Sermon preached at the Installation of the Rev. John Todd, 1752. Religion and Patriot-

ism the Constituents of a Good Soldier. A Sermon preached before a Company of Volunteers, 1755. Virginia's Danger and Remedy: two discourses occasioned by the severe Drought, and the Defeat of General Braddock, 1756. Letters showing the State of Religion in Virginia, particularly among the Negroes, 1751-1757. A Sermon on "Little Children invited to Jesus Christ, 1757. The Curse of Cowardice. A Sermon before the militia of Virginia, 1758. A Valedictory Discourse to the Senior Class in the College of New Jersey, 1760. A Sermon on the Death of George II., 1761. He was also the author of several important public documents, and of various hymns and other pieces of poetry, some of which attracted great attention. A selection of his sermons, in three volumes, including most of those which had been published in his life-time, was given to the world shortly after his death; and it may be doubted whether any sermons in the English language have been more widely read or more universally approved and admired.

President Davies, though his public life was all included within the brief period of fourteen years, left a broader, deeper, more enduring mark than almost any of his contemporaries in the ministry on either side of the ocean. Of his personal appearance I find no authentic record beyond the fact that he was of a somewhat plethoric habit; but his manners were highly graceful and polished, while yet they were characterized by a beautiful simplicity. He had great comprehensiveness and vigour of intellect; an exuberant but chaste imagination; a highly cultivated taste; and a memory from which hardly anything ever escaped that was lodged in it. In his moral constitution also he was eminently favoured—he was naturally genial and cordial; full of kindness, sympathy and charity. And to crown all, he was among the brightest models of Christian character—the work of the Spirit in his heart had been most radical and thorough. His religion, as it appeared in the outer life, was a most harmonious and attractive development of all the Christian graces. There was no service which he was not ready to undertake, no cross which he accounted it a hardship to bear for the honour of his Master. While he was steadfast to his own convictions of the truth, he was a fine example of enlightened catholicism, and welcomed cordially in Christian fellowship all in whom he could recognize the Master's image.

Being thus richly endowed both by nature and by grace, it were to be expected that he would adorn every relation, and that his life would be one of eminent usefulness. Accordingly, wherever he moved, blessings seemed to hang upon his footsteps. In his general intercourse with society, he was discreet and cautious, but was evidently always upon the look-out for opportunities to benefit those with whom he associated. He never took on self-righteousness or consequential airs, and yet every one saw and felt that his most ordinary actions were performed under the influence of the powers of the world to come. In the pulpit, he possessed rare advantages in respect to the style, the structure, and the delivery of his sermons. Though his style, as it appears in most of his printed sermons, might seem to an exact taste to be somewhat verbose, and sometimes even declamatory, yet it is to be borne in mind that these discourses, with few exceptions, were not designed for publication; and being intended for the ear rather than the eye, it may well be doubted whether the characteristics alluded to should be considered as blemishes. The power of his manner consisted in the melody and compass of his voice, in the naturalness, and gracefulness, and dignity of his attitudes, and in the fervour of

his spirit, brightening his countenance and animating his whole form. The staple of his preaching was in the highest degree evangelical—he seemed always to dwell within sight of the cross; and every discourse was redolent at once of tenderness and sublimity. There are passages in some of his printed sermons, which for simple exhibition of divine truth, and fervent power of appeal, are perhaps unrivalled. Dr. John H. Livingston, the only man whom I ever heard speak of President Davies' preaching, who had personal recollections of it, assured me that he was the most impressive and powerful pulpit orator to whom he had ever listened; and this is in accordance with the recorded statements of others who have heard him, as well as with his traditionary reputation. But his labour for the spiritual interests of his fellow-men were far from being confined to the pulpit—he was a most devoted pastor. Though he had so many congregations to care for, and his charge was spread over so wide a territory, he had his eye, as far as possible, upon the spiritual needs of all; and none ever wanted for suitable counsel, or consolation, or help, whom his pastoral attentions could reach. And he never considered himself as stepping aside from his path of duty as a Christian minister, in enlisting vigorously in behalf of his country. In the day of her peril he came up to her help, not as a party-politician, but as a self-sacrificing Christian patriot; and it was through his eloquent tongue and pen that multitudes of the young men of Virginia were baptized with a spirit of invincible courage. And last of all, during the brief period that he had occupied the presidential chair at Princeton, he proved himself fully worthy of the place—his kindly spirit, his urbane manners, his inventive and comprehensive intellect, his overpowering eloquence, his untiring industry, all contributed to give him an influence not only with the students, but with the Trustees, and all the friends of the College, to which it was not easy to fix a limit. Through his whole active life, he moved in a glorious sphere, and the lapse of a century has left his memory as fragrant as ever.

FOOTNOTES

1 Sermon No. LXIX, in this edition of his works.

2 Sermon No. LXI.

3 It is impossible to tell how far the decisive action which was taken by the House of Burgesses of Virginia at the commencement of the Revolution, may have been brought about by the influence of Mr. Davies' opinions and eloquence in that colony. But it is well known that from the eleventh to the twenty-second year of his age, Patrick Henry heard the patriotic sermons of Davies delivered, and was his enthusiastic admirer. It has been asserted, and it was very probably true, that Davies afforded the model and kindled the fire of Henry's eloquence.

[EDITOR OF THE BOARD.]

4 Sermon No. LXXXII. in these volumes.

5 Sermon LX.

6 Inserted in this volume.

7 Inserted in this volume.

8 Also in part published in this volume.