

A
BIOGRAPHICAL HISTORY

OF
LANCASTER COUNTY:

BEING A HISTORY OF
EARLY SETTLERS AND EMINENT MEN
OF THE COUNTY;

AS ALSO MUCH OTHER
UNPUBLISHED HISTORICAL INFORMATION, CHIEFLY
OF A LOCAL CHARACTER.

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*SMITH, SAMUEL STANHOPE, D.D., L.L.D., was born March 16th, 1750, at Pequea, Lancaster county, Penna. His father was the Rev. Robert Smith, a distinguished clergyman of the Presbyterian church, who emigrated from Ireland and established, and for many years superintended, an Academy, which supplied many able and excellent ministers to the denomination with which he was connected. His mother was Elizabeth, daughter of Samuel Blair, and sister of Samuel and John Blair, all of whom were among the most prominent clergymen of their day. The son, at a very early period, gave indications of possessing a mind of no common order, and the parents determined to give him the best advantages within their reach for cultivating it. When quite young he began the study of the languages in his father's school, and as his father had employed some of the most

accomplished teachers from abroad as his assistants, there was perhaps no school in the country, at that day, that furnished better advantages for becoming thoroughly grounded, especially in the classics. The only language allowed to be spoken in the school-room, was Latin, and whoever uttered a word in the mother tongue, was marked as a delinquent. Young Smith made the best of his opportunities, and was distinguished for his improvement in every branch to which he directed his attention. In his sixteenth year he was sent to Princeton college, entering the junior class, in which he immediately took rank amongst the best scholars. Shortly afterwards Dr. Witherspoon arrived from Scotland, and assumed the presidential chair of the institution, while the subject of our notice was an undergraduate. Before he had completed his eighteenth year he had received the degree of bachelor of arts, under circumstances the most honorable to his talents and acquirements, and the most gratifying to his ambition. During his collegiate career Mr. Smith came near making shipwreck of his religious principles, in consequence of his intimacy with Mr. Periam, the senior tutor, who had embraced Bishop Berkley's theory, denying the existence of matter. He became for a time an enthusiastic advocate of these opinions, insomuch that his friends began to have the most serious apprehensions that he had become a permanent accepter of the idealistic theory. When, how-

ever, Dr. Witherspoon arrived from Scotland, he brought with him the works of several distinguished Scottish philosophical writers, particularly Reid and Beattie, the influence of which was quickly perceptible in bringing back this gifted young man into the regions of common sense.

After taking his degree at Princeton, he returned to his father's house, and spent some time partly in assisting him in conducting his school, and partly in vigorous efforts for the higher cultivation of his own mind. He read the finest models in polite literature and the most accredited authors in intellectual and moral philosophy. He also occasionally tried his hand at writing poetry, but he was not much flattered, by the result of his efforts; and he seems to have abandoned his devotion to the muses on the ground that "*poeta nascitur non fit.*" He had not been long in this new sphere of labor before he was invited to return to Princeton as a tutor in the college, especially in the department of the classics and belles lettres. This position he accepted and filled from 1770 till 1773, discharging his duties in connection with the institution with exemplary fidelity and great acceptance, and all the while he was pursuing a course of theological study in reference to the ministry. About the close of his tutorship he was licensed to preach by the presbytery of New Castle. As his health had suffered not a little from severe affliction he determined, previous to assuming the responsibility of a stated charge, to spend some time as a missionary in the western counties of Virginia. When he reached that part of the country, he received a most cordial welcome from many Irish Presbyterians who had settled in that section. It was not long till his captivating oratory and exemplary deportment rendered him an almost universal favorite. Persons without distinction of sect or of rank, flocked to hear him; and those who had been entranced by the eloquence of Davies, seemed to feel as if another *Davies* had arisen. So powerful an impression did he make, that some of the most wealthy and influential persons soon set on foot a project for detaining him there as the head of a literary institution, and in a short time the funds requisite for establishing such an institution were sub-

scribed. The necessary buildings were erected, and the seminary was subsequently chartered by the Legislature under the name of Hampden Sydney college. The new college being at length nearly ready to commence its operations, he returned to the North and formed a matrimonial alliance with the eldest daughter of Dr. Witherspoon. He then returned to Virginia and took upon himself the double office of principal of the seminary and pastor of the church; and the duties of each he discharged in such a manner as to fulfill the highest expectations that had been formed concerning him. But the new labors were more than his constitution could endure; and after three or four years, a slight bleeding at the lungs admonished him to take at least a temporary respite from his burdens. By the advice of friends he resorted to the watering place among the western mountains, then acquiring considerable celebrity under the name of the "Sweet Springs." A residence at this place for a few weeks caused the unfavorable symptoms in a great measure to disappear, so that he returned to his family with his health in a good degree renovated.

At this period (1799), he was invited to the chair of moral philosophy, at Princeton; and notwithstanding his strong attachment to the infant seminary in Virginia, (of which he might be considered the founder), the prospect of a more extended sphere of usefulness in connection with his *Alma Mater*, induced him to accept the appointment. Upon his arrival at Princeton, however, a most unpromising state of things presented itself. The college itself was in ruins, in consequence of the uses and abuses to which it had been subjected by both the British and American soldiers, during the previous years of the Revolutionary war. The students were dispersed and all its operations had ceased. Mainly by the energy, wisdom, and general self-devotion of Mr. Smith, the college was speedily reorganized and all its usual exercises resumed. For several years Dr. Witherspoon, though retaining the office of president, was engaged as a member of Congress in the higher affairs of the nation. Owing to the fact that Dr. Witherspoon some years afterwards became, in a great measure, disqualified for the duties of the office of

president, being affected with total blindness and many other bodily infirmities, the great weight of care as to the management of the institution devolved upon the subject of this notice; and it is not too much to say, that it was indebted for no small degree of its prosperity to the increasing vigilance, the earnest efforts and the distinguished ability of Mr. Smith. In 1783 he was honored with the degree of Doctor of Divinity from Yale college; and in 1810 the degree of Doctor of Laws was conferred upon him by Howard University. In 1785 Dr. Smith was elected an honorary member of the American Philosophical Society, in Philadelphia—an institution distinguished not only for being the first of its kind, in the order of time in the country, but for numbering among its members many of the most brilliant, profound and erudite minds of which the country could boast. The same year he was appointed to deliver their anniversary address; and he met the occasion in a manner which of itself would have conferred lasting honor upon his name. The object of the address was to explain the causes of the variety in the figure and complexion of the human species, and to establish the identity of the race. It was published in the "Transactions" of the society, and was subsequently published in an enlarged and improved form in a separate volume. With this work his reputation as a philosopher, both at home and abroad, is in no small degree identified. In 1786 he was associated with several of the most distinguished and venerable men in the Presbyterian church, such as Witherspoon, McWhorter, Allison, Ewing, &c., in preparing the form of presbyterial government, which continues to the present time. His comprehensive views, and intimate acquaintance with all the forms of ecclesiastical procedure, eminently qualified him for the important service.

Upon the death of Dr. Witherspoon in 1794, Dr. Smith succeeded to the honors and full responsibilities of the office which his death had vacated. Besides being highly popular as the head of the institution, he had now acquired a reputation as a pulpit orator which rendered it an object for many, even from remote parts of the country, to listen to his preaching. His baccalaureate discourses particularly, which

were addressed to the senior class, on the Sabbath immediately preceding their graduation, were always of the highest order, and it was not uncommon for persons to go even from New York and Philadelphia to listen to them. One of his most splendid performances was his oration delivered at Trenton, on the death of Washington; the occasion roused his faculties to the utmost, and the result was a production of great beauty and power. In 1779 he published a volume of sermons, which were regarded as an important contribution to that department of our country's literature. They are characterized rather by general than particular views of evangelical truth, by a correct, elevated, and perhaps somewhat elaborate style, by occasional bold and eloquent apostrophes, and by many stirring appeals to the heart and conscience. In the spring of 1802, when the institution was at the full tide of its prosperity, the college edifice was burnt, together with the libraries, furniture and fixtures of every description. Indeed, all was gone except the charter, the grounds, and the naked walls of brick and stone, together with the exalted character of the seminary and the commanding reputation of its president. After the first stunning effect of the calamity was over, it was the general sentiment of all, that the necessary funds must be raised to rebuild the edifice and sustain the institution. Dr. Smith made a collecting tour through the southern States, and returned in the following spring with about one hundred thousand dollars, which, with liberal collections made in other parts of the Union, enabled him to accomplish vastly more than he had ventured to anticipate. This was his crowning achievement. He had won new honors, and gained many new friends. The college was popular and prosperous, and numbered two hundred students. New buildings were soon erected, and several new professors were added to the faculty. From this period Dr. Smith bent all his energies towards the management of the institution, and it continued year by year to rise in public estimation. But the advance of bodily infirmities were making visible progress in the case of the distinguished head of the college; and in the year 1812, in consequence of repeated strokes of palsy, he became too much

enfeebled to discharge any longer the duties of his office. He, therefore, at the next commencement, tendered his resignation as president, and retired to a place which the board of trustees provided for him, and there spent the remainder of his life. For several years he occupied himself in revising and preparing for the press some of his works, but at length disease had made such havoc with his constitution, that he was scarcely capable of any mental labor. After a long course of gradual and almost imperceptible decline, he died August 21st, 1819, in the 70th year of his age. His published works are the following: An essay on the causes of the variety of complexion and figure of the human species, to which are added strictures on Lord Kaimes' discourse on the Original Diversity of Mankind, 8vo., 1787. Sermons, 8vo., 1799. Lectures on the Evidences of the Christian Religion, 12mo., 1809. Lectures on Moral and Political Philosophy, 12mo., 1812. A comprehensive view of the leading and most important principles of Natural and Revealed Religion, 8vo., 1816. Sermons, to which is prefixed a brief memoir of his life and writings, 2 vols., 8vo., (posthumous,) 1821.