

THE PANOPLIST;

OR,

THE CHRISTIAN'S ARMORY.

No. 21.] FEBRUARY, 1807. [No. 9. VOL. II.

Biography.

To the Editors of the Panoplist.

GENTLEMEN,

DESIROUS of paying a tribute of respect to the memory of a good and useful man, who exhibited through life, an example worthy of imitation; and at the request of a respectable member and officer in the church founded by the Rev. Mr. Moorhead, I take the liberty to enclose the following sketches of his life.

In my youth, I was well acquainted with him, though he was then considerably advanced in years. From information of some of his aged acquaintances and my own knowledge, I have collected the following account of him. It is imperfect, because little is known of the early periods of his life. His contemporaries have long since deceased, and the few writings which he left, were lost in the siege of Boston. Very respectfully yours, &c.

D. M.

MEMOIRS OF REV. JOHN MOORHEAD,

FIRST MINISTER AND FOUNDER OF A PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN BOSTON.

ABOUT the year 1729, a number of Protestant, Presbyterian families from the North of Ireland, came to Boston. They were from the counties of Londonderry, Donnegall, Antrim and Down. The motives inducing a removal from their native country, were the enhanced price of their leased lands, ecclesiastical oppression, the prospect of the acquisition of property here; but chiefly that they might enjoy religious and civil liberty, in this land of freedom. They were a company of religious, moral and industrious people. They met with opposition at their landing, and patiently suffered the insults of the misinformed *rabble*. Some were opposed to their reception into the town, ignorantly imag-

ining, that, as they came from Ireland, they must necessarily be Papists. But the truth was, that the Protestant sect, to which those strangers belonged, had suffered far more dreadfully by the Papists in Ireland, in plunderings, massacres, and all the horrors of persecution, than the fathers of New England ever had, by all the oppressions of the English hierarchy, conducted by the sanguinary bishop Laud and his associates.

They were generally descendants of ancestors, who emigrated from Scotland to Ireland, in the reign of king James I.; and settled in the north part of the Island, which had been conquered, and the estates confiscated, by his predecessor Queen Elizabeth.

Hence they were called Scotch Irish.

On their admittance into Boston, their first care was to procure a place for the peaceable worship of Almighty God, according to his word. They purchased a lot of land in Bury street, cornering on Federal street, then called Long Lane. Either before they left Ireland, or on their arrival, they invited Mr. Moorhead to be their minister, and he arrived in Boston, soon after them.

Mr. Moorhead was born in Newton, near Belfast, in the county of Down, of pious and respectable parents. His father, who was a farmer, gave him the best advantages within his power, for improvement in learning. He finished his education at one of the universities in Scotland. He came to Boston about the twenty-third year of his age. There is no record of his ordination.* This little colony of Christians, for some time, carried on the public worship of God in a barn, which stood on the lot which they had purchased. In this humble temple, with uplifted hearts and

* About the time of the arrival of Mr. Moorhead's flock, a considerable number of families, with three or four ministers, also came over from Ireland, and fixed down in different parts of the country. Particularly, the Rev. John M'Kinstry, who with his people, in 1730, began the settlement of Ellington, (in Connecticut) then called Windsor Goshen. The Rev. Mr. Aberrombie, who, with a number of families, settled in Pelham; several at Coleraine, and also in the North Society in East Windsor, and at Brookfield. The Rev. James M'Gregore, with a considerable congregation, in 1719, began the settlement of Londonderry, in New-Hampshire. He was succeeded by Rev. Matthew Clarke in 1729.

voices, they worshipped and honoured Him, who, for our salvation, condescended to be born in a stable.

As the congregation increased, by migrations from Ireland and Scotland, they enlarged the place of worship, by adding two wings to the lowly building. The present commodious and decent edifice was built Anno 1744.

The first meeting of the brethren, with their minister, for the election of Elders, according to the discipline of the Church of Scotland, was at the house of John Little, in Milk Street, July 14th, 1730.

The Elders then chosen, were John Young, Robert Patton, Samuel M'Clure, Richard M'Clure, and Thomas M'Mullen, who were solemnly consecrated to that office.

In doctrine, worship and discipline, the church was formed according to the model of the Presbyterian church of Scotland. The Elders with the Pastor formed the session, and constituted an ecclesiastical court, for the adjudication of all matters of government of the congregation, and discipline of its members. All baptized persons, as well as members in communion, were subjected to the watch and discipline of the session. Candidates for admission into the church, were examined and admitted by them. Their discipline was strict, and conducted with great solemnity and decorum. The session met frequently, either at Mr. Moorhead's, or the houses of the Elders, in rotation. It began with prayer, by the Minister, and closed with the same by one of the Elders.

In 1744, the number of Elders of his church, were

twelve, and the congregation was divided into twelve districts. The duty of each Elder was to visit and pray with the sick, within his bounds; to counsel, advise, and reprove, when needful; and to notify the session of the circumstances of the poor, and obtain for them some pecuniary assistance.

Once or twice in the year, Mr. Moorhead visited all the families of his congregation, in town and country; (one of the Elders, in rotation, accompanying him,) for the purpose of religious instruction. On these occasions, he addressed the heads of families with freedom and affection, and inquired into their spiritual state. catechised and exhorted the children and servants, and concluded his visit with prayer. In this last solemn act, (which he always performed on his knees, at home and in the houses of his people) he used earnestly to pray for the family, and the spiritual circumstances of each member, as they respectively needed.

In addition to this labour of family visitations, he also convened, twice in the year, the families, according to the districts, at the meeting-house, when he conversed with the heads of families, asking them questions, on some of the most important doctrines of the gospel, agreeably to the Westminster confession of faith; and catechised the children and youth.

He was unwearied in his endeavours to promote the edification and salvation of his people. His thoughts and plans of benevolence extended also to their temporal concerns. He encouraged the industrious, by such small pecuniary aids as

were within his ability to bestow; or solicited assistance for them. Virtuous strangers from North Britain and Ireland, were sure to find a friend in him. As a good Bishop, he was given to hospitality. As a sample of this benevolence, allow me to mention, that it was his custom, when he heard of ministers from the country, who were strangers in Boston, at public houses, to go or send for them, to come to his hospitable roof.

He was faithful and impartial in his duty, as a reprover of error and vice in all their forms. While he rebuked with sharpness, he shewed an affectionate concern for the offender, and by meekness and condescension, laboured to reclaim him. With equal cheerfulness, he visited the hut or the garret of the poor, and the parlour of the rich, to do them good. Some were offended at the severity of his reproofs; and withdrew from his society to others, where they could find more indulgence. He was universally respected by the good, and feared by those of the opposite character. He appeared less ambitious of fame, than of faithfulness as a minister of Christ.

Mr. Moorhead was a plain, evangelical and practical preacher. He paid very little attention to the ornaments of style, in his pulpit performances. His discourses appeared to be extemporaneous. He expounded the Scriptures in course in the morning, and delivered a sermon in the afternoon. He preached the law and the gospel, in their spirituality and purity. He insisted principally on the peculiar doctrines of the gospel,—the deep depravity of human nature—the

Divinity of Jesus Christ, and the efficacy of the atonement—the special agency of the Divine Spirit in regeneration; the necessity of repentance; of faith in Christ, and of good works.

He possessed strength of mind, sprightliness of imagination, and readiness of expression; but appeared indifferent to the choice of the most appropriate phraseology. His manner was solemn, affectionate, and pathetic. His language and manner were the index of his mind. He spoke from the heart. His tears flowed in the earnest, alarming, or persuasive applications of his sermons. He was an "Israelite, in whom was no guile." Such was the success of his faithful labours, and the accession of foreign Protestants, that in six years, after the founding of the church, the communicants were about two hundred and fifty. Four times in the year, he celebrated the Lord's supper. They were seasons of great solemnity. On these occasions Mr. Moorhead commonly had the assistance of one or two of his brethren, particularly the Rev. Mr. M'Gregore, and afterwards the Rev. Mr. Clarke of Londonderry, and once, of the celebrated Mr. Whitefield, when every heart was moved by his solemn and enraptured performances. On these occasions, each minister served at table in rotation.

At those seasons of fervent zeal in religion, the house could not contain the multitudes, eager to hear the words of eternal life. The doors and windows were crowded with spectators.

The society in general were respectable for good morals, industry, sobriety, attention to the

duties of family religion, and the government and education of their children.

At the age of twenty-six, Mr. Moorhead married Miss Sarah Parsons, an English lady of a bright genius and good education. With her he lived happily, many years; and by her had several children. The only surviving one, is the widow of the late Capt. Alexander Wilson of Boston.

He continued the faithful pastor of the church about forty-four years, and died at the commencement of the revolutionary war, and entered we trust into everlasting rest.

The children of the founders of the church, feeling less attachment than their fathers, to the particular forms of Presbyterian church government, and finding themselves locally distant from those of the same denomination, with whom to associate; changed the Presbyterian, for the Congregational form of government, at the settlement of the Rev. Dr. Belknap, the successor of Mr. Moorhead.

May the purity of evangelical doctrines and manners, be forever maintained in a church founded by the signal direction and blessing of Heaven!

LIFE OF REV. JOHN SERGEANT.

(Continued from page 355.)

BESIDES contending with the difficulties, which arose from the ignorance, the degradation, the habits of the Indians, Mr. Sergeant met with obstructions to his benevolent designs from an unexpected quarter. If indignation ever rises in the breast of