

The Rev. Bela Hubbard, D.D.

Annals of the American pulpit

by William Buell Sprague

1861

BELA HUBBARD, D. D, 1764—1812¹

Bela Hubbard, a son of Daniel and Diana Hubbard, was born at Guilford, Conn., on the 27th of August, 1739. His parents were Congregationalists, and he, of course, received his early education in that connection; but, at some period, probably not far from the time of his leaving College, he joined the Episcopal Church. He graduated at Yale in 1758; and afterwards passed a year at King's (now Columbia) College, New York, under the theological instruction of its President,—the Rev. Dr. Johnson, who was his intimate friend, and a connection by marriage; both having originated from the same town. In the autumn of 1763, he crossed the ocean with his friend, Mr. (afterwards Bishop) Jarvis, with the view of obtaining Holy Orders. He arrived in England in December, and remained there till April following. He was ordained Deacon by the Rt. Reverend Dr. Frederick Keppel, Bishop of Exeter, in the King's Chapel, London, on the 5th of February, 1764; and Priest, by the Rt. Reverend Dr. Charles Lyttleton, Bishop of Carlisle, in St. James' Church, Westminster, on the 19th of the same month; and on the 28th he was licensed by the Rt. Reverend Dr. Richard Osbaleston, Bishop of London, to perform the office of Priest in New England.

On his return from England, Mr. Hubbard officiated at Guilford and Killingworth till the year 1767; when the Venerable Society for Propagating the Gospel in Foreign Parts appointed him their Missionary at New Haven and West Haven. He divided his labors equally between these two places until the Revolution; after that period, until 1791, he gave but one fourth of his time to West Haven; and from that time till the close of his ministry, his services were confined almost entirely to New Haven; though he still occasionally preached in the neighboring parishes. Mr. Hubbard remained loyal to the King of Great Britain during the Revolutionary struggle. His feelings on this subject are indicated in an extract from a letter which he addressed to the Venerable Society; and which, though it preceded, by several years, the actual opening of the Revolution, has reference to the state of things which was then rapidly tending towards that result. The letter is dated "New Haven, January 10, 1769," and the extract is as follows:—

"I can say it with sincerity that I have faithfully endeavored to discharge my duty as a servant of the Society, and as a Minister of Jesus Christ ; and I trust that my labors in the vineyard have not been altogether in vain. I have not failed to exhort them, in these unhappy times, to let the world see that Churchmen fear God and honor the King; to do their utmost to live peaceably with all men; not to use their liberty for a cloak of maliciousness, but as the servants of God; and I know of no disposition in anyone member of our excellent Church to go over to the party of the Sons of Liberty, (though falsely so called,) who have given so much trouble to the Mother Country, and to all in her Colonies who are friendly to the cause of the nation."

But, notwithstanding Mr. Hubbard's continued loyalty, he seems to have conducted himself with so much discretion and inoffensiveness during the Revolution, that he was allowed to pursue the duties of his vocation without any very serious embarrassment. While the British army were in possession of New Haven, their officers treated him and his family with respect and kindness, forbidding any of the soldiers to enter his house, or in any manner to molest the premises; and, in consequence of this exemption from troublesome visits from the soldiery, he was enabled to save a considerable amount of property to the suffering inhabitants of the city.

Mr. Hubbard continued to receive a salary of sixty pounds per annum from the Society by which he was employed, until the Peace in 1783, when he became entirely dependant on his parishes. Though his salary was, for many years, small, the liberality of his parishioners and the exemplary economy of his wife still rendered him comfortable; and as his people increased in numbers and in wealth, his salary became more ample.

In 1804, he was honored with the Degree of Doctor of Divinity from Yale College.

In 1811, the Rev. Henry Whitlock became Assistant Minister in Trinity Church, of which Dr. Hubbard was Rector. Dr. H., however, continued to preach, occasionally, until his last illness, which was of many months duration. He died on Sunday, December 6, 1812, in the seventy-fourth year of his age. His Funeral Sermon was preached by his Assistant, the Rev. Mr. Whitlock, and was published. The burial service was performed by the friend of both his early and later years, Bishop Jarvis.

He was married in May, 1768, at Fairfield, Conn., to Grace Dunbar Hill, who was born in the Island of Antigua, in the year 1747. She survived her husband about eight years, and died in 1820. Two of the sons were graduates of Yale College—one of them (Bela) graduated in 1792, was Judge of the Parish of Assumption, a large District in the State of Louisiana, and died in 1841. The other (Thomas Hill) graduated in 1799, entered the Profession of Law, and has been a member of

Congress. He, with one sister, the widow of the late Hon. Timothy Pitkin, are (1855) the only surviving members of the family.

MS. from his son, Hon. T. H. Hubbard.—Whitlock's Fun. Scrm.—Hawkins' Miss. Ch. Kog. This text is taken from Sprague, William Buell, *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*, Volume 5, Robert Carter & Brothers, 1861, Volume 5 pp. 234-5

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