

# THE LIFE

OF

# ASHBEL GREEN, V. D. M.

BEGUN TO BE WRITTEN BY HIMSELF IN HIS EIGHTY-SECOND YEAR  
AND CONTINUED TO HIS EIGHTY-FOURTH.

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PREPARED FOR THE PRESS AT THE AUTHOR'S REQUEST

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#### ERRATA.

- Page 28, ninth line from the bottom, for "1776," read "1774."  
Page 48, for "from the year 1782 to 1788," read "from the year 1778 to 1782."  
Page 100, ninth line from the top, for "laid," read "lay."  
Page 152, ninth line from the top, for "Lawrence," read "Lawrenceville."  
Page 154, seventeenth line from the top, for "seventy-nine," read "twenty-nine."  
Page 201, seventeenth line from the bottom, for "as," read "are."  
Page 314, ninth line from the top, for "popular," read "populous."  
Page 321, fourteenth line from the bottom, for "Judicatures," read "Judicatories."  
Page 351, fifth line from the bottom, for "Hayward," read "Hazard."  
Page 424, third line from the bottom, for "comparing," read "composing."  
Page 500, eighth line from the bottom, for "88th," read "86th."  
Page 611, fourteenth line from the bottom, for "we" read "he."  
Page 612, twenty-first line from the bottom, for "appreciate" read "associate."

with less favour, on account of the honest bluntness with which it was imparted. That Dr. Green was tenacious of opinions which he deemed important, and that he sometimes enforced them with an independence and inflexible perseverance which savoured of sternness and dogmatism, we do not dispute. And yet the sentiments of others, as well as their persons, were treated with becoming respect. When on one occasion Dr. John Breckinridge proposed a conference with certain clergymen on a subject of great importance, pleasantly adding by way of supporting his suggestion, "in the multitude of counsellors there is safety." "Very true," said Dr. Green; "but you know, brother Breckinridge, that not every man is fit to be a counsellor."

In the following communication from Dr. Miller of Princeton, the reader will find a rehearsal of some occurrences in the life of Dr. Green which have already been mentioned; yet his interest in the narrative will not be abated by the repetition. In a private note which accompanied the contribution of Dr. Miller, he speaks of its "failing to come up to what he hoped to make it," but with characteristic humility he adds, that "such as it is, you must receive it as the affectionate tribute of an aged man who, amidst all his infirmities and official cares and burdens, has done what he could."

REVEREND AND DEAR BROTHER :

You request me to communicate to you some of my recollections of the late venerable and excellent Dr. Green. I comply with this request with peculiar plea-

sure, because, in common with every Presbyterian in the United States, I feel myself a deep debtor to his memory, and deem it a privilege to be allowed to make the smallest contribution toward embalming it in the religious mind of our country. While I write, the infirmities of near four-score years begin to press upon me, and to admonish me that I too must soon "put off this tabernacle."

My acquaintance with that great and good man began about sixty years ago, when he was the beloved and highly popular co-pastor of the Second Presbyterian church in the city of Philadelphia, and when I was a youthful student in the University of Pennsylvania. In the course of my connection with the University, I was a boarder in the family of a beloved sister, who was a worshipper in the church in which he preached, and in which, from that circumstance, as well as from choice, I was a constant hearer.

In a few months after I entered the University, I was seized with a severe inflammatory fever, which brought me very low, and confined me to the house for a number of weeks. In the course of this illness, Dr. Green, though I had no other claim upon him than being the son of a brother minister, and a boarder in the house of one of his flock, kindly and affectionately called, more than once, to see me, and conversed and prayed with me with a fidelity and tenderness which I shall never forget, and which marked, at that early period of his pastoral life, a sacred regard to his official duties, and a happy talent in the fulfilment of them.

Soon after I had completed my course in the University, this benevolent and devoted man, ever on the

watch to do good, having heard that I had resolved to engage in the study of theology with a view to the gospel ministry, wrote me a long, affectionate, and most instructive letter, filled with those large views of ministerial furniture and duty for which he was always remarkable, and written with that wisdom, piety, learning and kindness which were adapted at once to give light, and a happy impulse to an inexperienced, youthful student. I felt myself much his debtor for this act of friendship, and shall never cease to regard it with fervent gratitude.

When I became a preacher, he continued to manifest the same undiminished kindness on every practicable occasion. He took me by the hand with marked Christian affability and condescension, and seemed ever on the watch to promote the improvement and the usefulness of all on whom he had an opportunity of exerting influence; especially of all candidates for the sacred office, and youthful ministers. On that account, during the long continuance of his pastoral charge in Philadelphia, and the shorter period of my own in New York, I always considered my intercourse with Dr. Green as among the most decisively attractive and profitable that I could enjoy. I ever approached him as an elder brother, who was fervently pious, full of large and liberal views, richly furnished with ministerial gifts and graces, without suspicion or jealousy, and ever ready to impart all that he possessed for the benefit of others, and to promote the temporal and spiritual welfare of all within his reach. I ever coveted the opportunity of spending an hour with him as an intellectual and moral

feast, from which, I should be wanting to myself, if I did not profit.

Dr. Green's pastoral relation to the Second church in Philadelphia commenced in the month of May, A. D. 1787. In the course of the next year, as before stated, I was led, in the providence of God, to take up my abode for a time in that city, as a student, and had much opportunity of enjoying his ministry. He was eminently popular. No minister in the city approached him in this respect. Crowds flocked to hear him, more than the place of worship could contain. His evening services especially were attended by all denominations; and that not once or a few times only, but from one year's end to another, and for a course of years, with unabating interest. And truly his discourses were so rich in weighty thought, so beautiful in their language, and so powerful in delivery, that they were well adapted to attract and gratify all hearers of intelligence and of pious taste.

The preaching, however, of this eminent man, in a few years after his settlement in the pastoral relation, underwent a gradual change. His pious friends remarked that, as his gifts and graces became more mature, his discourses were less laboured in respect to rhetorical ornament; but, at the same time, more rich in evangelical instruction, and more edifying in their experimental character. If they lost something of that ornament which had caused them to be applauded by admiring crowds, they gained in those more important characteristics which rendered them better adapted to convince and convert sinners, and to build up believers

in faith and holiness unto salvation. His earliest discourses were indeed well adapted to enlighten and gratify the pious, as well as those of a more literary taste; but as he grew in grace, and advanced in pastoral experience, his pulpit discourses became more and more adapted to feed the pious, while they were not less fitted to satisfy the most intelligent hearers. This, however, is saying no more than might naturally be expected from a man, as he was, evidently growing as a Christian, as well as in the furniture and vigour of his intellectual frame.

For the first five or six years of Dr. Green's pastoral relation to the Second church in Philadelphia, he had a colleague, the venerable Dr. Sproat. There is, perhaps, hardly any thing that puts a man's real spirit to a more decisive and even severe test, than being placed in this relation. An ambitious, encroaching, selfish man, can hardly ever sustain it, without bearing much discomfort himself, and inflicting quite as much, if not more, upon his colleague. The excellent man of whom I speak, had large experience of this relation in various forms, and in every case acquitted himself in a manner which manifested much amiableness of natural temper, as well as a large measure of the Christian spirit. With his first colleague, he served as a son with a father; without jealousy, without rivalry, and with the utmost cordiality of affection. With later colleagues, both of whom were much younger men than himself,\* his

\* The Rev. Dr. John N. Abeel, afterwards of New York, and long since deceased; and the Rev. Dr. Jacob J. Janeway, still surviving, in advanced life, and eminently useful, both from the pulpit and the press.

connection was no less affectionate and pleasant. He was so happy as to find in them men of an amiable temper, as well as an evangelical spirit; and his treatment of them was, throughout, such as might have been expected from a man who "preferred Jerusalem above his chief joy." The Rev. Dr. Janeway, the last of his colleagues, in the excellent sermon which he delivered at the funeral of his venerated friend, and which you had the privilege of hearing, gave an attestation in favour of his collegiate character of the most emphatic and touching kind.

But it was not only as a colleague that Dr. Green displayed peculiar force and elevation of character. From the time of his entrance on the ministry of the Presbyterian Church in 1787, for more than forty years together, he set an example of diligence and indefatigable labour in the service of the Church which can never be remembered without honourable and grateful acknowledgment. In all the great movements of his Church, during the period in question, whether in the cause of domestic or foreign missions, in securing the appropriate education of candidates for the holy ministry, or in promoting a system of evangelical literature for the benefit of the Christian community—in all, either in consultation or labour, and commonly in both, he might be said, without exaggeration, to be the master spirit to whom the whole Church was accustomed to look more than to any other individual. His commanding talents as a speaker in ecclesiastical judicatories; his strong good sense; his practical wisdom and prudence; and his power to influence and control public bodies, I need not dwell upon, because all who



knew the man, knew that in all these respects he was eminently distinguished.

In planning and establishing the Theological Seminary in this place, he took, as on every other great occasion, a leading part. He laboured indefatigably to pave the way for its establishment. He was the penman of its constitution. When it was organized, he was made the first President of its Board of Directors, and continued to occupy that station until his decease. He made a liberal donation of land by purchase, in addition to that made by the Hon. Richard Stockton, for the location of its public buildings. He was one of the most liberal contributors to the formation of its library, and might be said, more than other individual, to have been the father of the institution; for which he delighted to contrive, to labour, and to pray, as long as he lived.

When he consented to leave his beloved pastoral charge in Philadelphia, and to accept the presidentship of the College of New Jersey, it fell to my lot to be much with him, and to have some agency in bringing about that removal; and I can in the most unequivocal manner, bear testimony that the consideration which appeared to govern him in making the change, was the hope of being able, under the divine blessing, to exert a religious influence on the College, and to be in some measure instrumental in making it subservient to its great original purpose, that of promoting learning in union with piety; and thus preparing an enlightened and devoted ministry for the service of the Church of Christ.

And, accordingly, no one acquainted with the history

and the fruits of his presidentship in that important institution can doubt that his hopes in this respect were, in a very happy degree, realized. The talent, the fidelity, and the success with which, for ten years, he filled that office, are too well known, and have been too emphatically acknowledged by the public voice to render any illustration necessary. He was the first head of a college in the United States who caused the Bible to be introduced as a subject of regular collegiate study. And this signal honour to the Word of God was soon followed by a revival of religion in the College, marked by a power, and a happy influence remembered to this day with deep interest. He also introduced a set of weekly lectures, happily adapted to engage the attention, and to imbue the minds of youth with divine knowledge, which gained a degree of attendance and popularity which has never been exceeded, if equalled, in any similar effort before or since. The incumbency of Dr. Green as the head of the College of New Jersey, will ever be considered by all competent judges as forming a memorable and highly important era in the history of that seat of learning.

In 1822, this venerable man thought proper, on account of his infirm health, and some peculiar circumstances in the state of the College, to resign the presidentship of the institution. He never afterwards assumed a stated charge of any kind; but retired to the city of Philadelphia, where he had so long resided, and where he had a large body of affectionate friends, who were glad to receive him, and to honour and render comfortable his declining years. Here he passed the remainder of his life; not in indolent indulgence, which

made no part of his character, but in preaching the gospel, whenever he had an opportunity, especially to the poor, from whom no remuneration was sought or expected; in preparing for the press several important works from his own pen; and in conducting a valuable periodical, the *Christian Advocate*, which extended to a number of volumes, and forms a permanent monument of his learned and pious industry.

For several years before the close of life, his infirmities rendered him incapable of any public labour; but even in this period of feebleness and decline, it is delightful to reflect that he was not idle. He was still employed in reading, in writing, and, above all, in those devotional exercises which seemed to form the very element of his soul, as he drew near to the consummation of his hopes and joys. At length, worn out with age and labours, he closed his career in the full sunshine of faith and hope, and entered, as we all confidently believe, on the joys of that Lord whose he was, and whom he had so long and faithfully served.

But there were several traits in the character of our departed father, best known to his intimate friends, which justice to his memory, and indeed, justice to ourselves, call upon us who survive him to notice, and to dwell upon somewhat in detail.

I. And the first of these which I desire to commemorate is, his ardent piety. To say simply, that a minister of the gospel is regarded as a pious man, is to say little. Without piety, he is nothing. He lacks the greatest glory of an ambassador of Christ. If I had not believed that in this part of the character of the venerable man before us, there was not only *sincerity*, but

*pre-eminence*; not only real piety, but piety of extraordinary elevation and power, I should not have referred to it distinctly at all. But my impression is, that ever since I have known him, his devotional habits were peculiar, and indicated an uncommonly deep and fervent piety. I was struck with this in all his habits and exhibitions of character. In his conversation; in his correspondence; in his mode of counselling those who were addressing themselves to the study of theology; nay, in the most casual and unreserved intercourses of society, he appeared the deeply spiritual, devoted man of God. As he advanced in life, this spirit seemed sensibly and prominently to gather strength. And with respect to the later years of his life, exercises of devotion occupied, I believe, the greater part of his time, and seemed to be the absorbing element of his soul. In regard to the service of the sanctuary, I know not that I ever saw any man who seemed to engage in public prayer with manifestations of more entire and cordial devotion. And to one point in this connexion, I think it my duty to say, in these days of sedentary sluggishness in public prayer, when so many of the young and the healthy are seen indolently lounging amidst the devotional exercises of the Lord's house, that the example of our departed father ought ever to shame them. I was never placed near him as a fellow-worshipper, without observing how uniformly, amidst all his bodily weakness, and sometimes when I knew that he was hardly able, without distress, to stand erect, he stood up, and maintained a posture of solemn reverence, and evidently joined, with a striking manifestation of fervour, in every petition. His joining in the public prayer

was no doubtful matter. Every one that saw him was satisfied that he was no cold or indifferent member of the assembly, but was absorbed in the exercise.

Accordingly, much intercourse with him for many years, warrants me in saying, that there was hardly any point concerning which he expressed more solicitude than the cultivation of vital piety among our candidates for the holy ministry. The pointed manner in which he introduced and dwelt upon this subject in penning the plan of our Seminary; the emphatic and solemn terms in which he urged it in all his addresses to the students; and the tender earnestness with which he adverted to it at every public and private opportunity, all testified the habitual anxiety of his mind on this subject. He ever contended for the importance, not merely of piety, but of ardent governing piety in the sacred office. He regarded and ever earnestly recommended it as the most precious element of comfort and strength amidst the self-denial and labours of the office; as the only solid and effectual basis of the best pulpit eloquence; and as the only scriptural pledge of success in attaining the great end of the office. It is pleasing to recollect what a happy comment on these often repeated sentiments was furnished by his own bright example.

II. The next trait in the character of this venerable man which I wish especially to commemorate, is his warm attachment to evangelical truth, and his fidelity in maintaining it from the beginning to the end of his course. Of this he gave so many public and strongly marked testimonies, that some who were imperfectly acquainted with his character, hastily imagined that

he was a bigoted sectarian. There never was a greater mistake. He was eminently a man of an enlarged and catholic spirit. He loved the image of Christ, and zeal for the doctrines of the gospel, under whatever name or form he found them. But in maintaining the doctrines and order of his own Church, to whose formularies he had solemnly subscribed, he set an example of noble fidelity and courage. With him, subscription to articles of faith, was not an act either of cold flexible politeness, or of calculating policy. He considered it as involving both an appeal to the heart-searching God, and a solemn pledge of fidelity to his Master in heaven. For this, I am aware, he has been sometimes reproached as a "heresy-hunter," by men of "ductile consciences," who were ready to subscribe to almost any form of words "for substance of doctrine." But the consistent and faithful lover of truth will honour him for it as long as his memory lasts.

Nor was this all, he was not only a zealous, steadfast, and persevering friend and advocate of evangelical truth; but his regard to the claims of all truth between man and man in the intercourse of life, was conspicuous and remarkable. I know not that I ever saw a man whose sensibility to the sacredness of truth, and whose rigid sacred care not to depart from it, were more vigilant and more scrupulous than his. He appeared to be, not only on his guard whenever he was called to state a fact, but to speak as if on oath. He seemed indeed to be habitually anxious that what he said, should, in all cases, express neither more nor less than the exact truth. For one so eminently intellectual, he was one of the most transparent men I ever

saw. He was the very impersonation of honesty and candour. There was no concealment about him. Every one who had a desire to know, might always know, with unerring certainty where to find him. Of this I have seen instances so peculiar and so strongly marked, that they can never be effaced from my memory; and, in my opinion, ought never to be omitted in making an appropriate estimate of his character.

A remarkable instance of his perfect candour once occurred in the General Assembly. He was the proposer and leading advocate of a measure in that body which he deemed of great importance, and which he was very intent on carrying. In the course of a zealous and able speech which he made in its support, he mentioned, in detail, a number of the objections which had been made to the plan, most of which he had heard mentioned, and some of which had occurred to his own mind. Among the latter, he mentioned one objection, truly formidable, which, he said, he had never heard mentioned; but which had occurred to himself, and which he thought it his duty candidly to state and answer. After the vote was taken, which resulted in the adoption of his proposed measure, one of its most zealous opponents said to him, "Doctor, I wondered a little that you were so free in bringing forward so many objections to your measure; especially the one which you mentioned as being the weightiest in your own view. I had never heard of it before you mentioned it; and I verily think if you had kept that out of view, you would have gotten a far greater majority." The Doctor replied, "My friend, I know it. But I would far rather have lost my cause than gained it by conceal-

ment, or any thing approaching to deception. I determined, therefore, to run the risk of losing all rather than to keep any thing back that might lead to a full and candid view of the subject."

I was always very forcibly struck with the character of Dr. Green's speeches in the General Assembly, and the other higher judicatories of the Church. In the debates in all deliberative bodies, and even in those of the Church, it is too common to witness the use of weapons which all sanctified feeling ought to proscribe; the weapons of ridicule, of sarcasm, of recrimination, and such over-painting in the warmth of debate, as amounts to real exaggeration. I have never known the venerated subject of this letter on any occasion to employ any of these weapons. He was ever grave, dignified, respectful, and as fair as candour itself could dictate. I do not remember ever to have heard him, however ardently engaged in pleading a favourite cause, make an exaggerated statement. Here, as in every other case, he seemed to speak as if on oath—with the most scrupulous care not to transcend the truth.

Perhaps I ought here not to omit taking notice of one fact, or of what I suppose to be a fact, growing out of the sacred regard to truth which this venerable and excellent man ever manifested. If I mistake not, this scrupulous care to avoid every expression which approached to an invasion of the strictest truth, has impressed itself on his *style of writing*. His style, it appears to me, is less terse, pointed, and fluent on that account; more encumbered with exceptions, qualifying clauses, softening expressions, and circuitous statements, than is desirable. We always read his writings with



approbation of the just sentiments and the vigorous thinking which they indicate; but sometimes feeling as if the writer would have attained a still more spirited and nervous style, if he had been less painfully scrupulous in weighing every sentence which he penned in the scales of the strictest historical verity.

III. Our departed father set us a noble example of prompt and punctual response to all the claims of justice and of charity which were presented to him. I know not that I ever knew a man more punctiliously observant of that inspired precept, owe no man any thing, but to love one another. No man's due was ever kept back by him one hour after he knew that it was due. He was ready to submit to any self-denial rather than allow of this. Of this habit his whole life was a uniform exemplification; and his last days furnished a remarkable and most graphic example.

His freedom from a mercenary spirit was remarkable and edifying. The lust of accumulating property, what has been emphatically called "the dollar mania," made no part of his character. His aims in this respect were ever marked by moderation. At the same time his responses to the claims of charity were ever prompt and liberal. Though his pecuniary resources were never ample, and, toward the close of life, were rather restricted, he was always ready and free in his contributions for the Redeemer's kingdom, and in responding to all the reasonable calls of benevolence. It was no uncommon thing for him, with his small means, to subscribe more largely to important objects of Christian benevolence, than many of the far more wealthy professors of religion around him. Nay, on

one occasion, his donation to an important object was so disproportionably great, so far beyond what his friends thought reasonable, that one of them, a distinguished worldly man of great wealth, who had himself subscribed largely, but less, to the same object, said of him, in my hearing, "If he is not restrained, he will give away his whole property, even all his living." He was accustomed to say, that a man ought to be the dispenser of his charities in person during his life, and not leave this important work to be done less judiciously, by his successors.

IV. I have only to add, that our departed father ever manifested a remarkable freedom from jealousy or suspicion toward those with whom he was called to labour. There is a class of little men, ever haunted with visions of jealousy and suspicion; fancying in every movement of those around them something intended to interfere with their plans of gain, of ambition, or of aggrandizement; or to bear away something that belongs to them: who see no evil in any thing which they can bend to their selfish purposes, and no good in any thing which they cannot so bend; in short, whose every plan is a calculation of practical egotism, and whose minds are ever teeming with apprehension of sinister designs toward themselves on the part of others. Such men, whether found in the ranks of the Christian ministry or elsewhere, are greatly to be pitied, as the worst enemies to their own peace, and as utterly unfit to cooperate with others, however disinterested and unsuspecting. Amidst all their suspicions they forget to suspect themselves. Perhaps no eminent man, surrounded as he was, with official honours and responsi-

bilities, and in contact with his brethren in so many points, was ever more free from this unhappy spirit. Being wholly without sinister designs himself, he was never ready to suspect others of such designs. No one, I will venture to say, ever knew him to turn away from any worthy person, or promising plan, from an apprehension of its interference with his own elevation or prerogatives. It was ever enough to insure his favour to any proposal or scheme, that it promised to promote the extension of truth, and the honour of his Master in heaven.

Such are some of my recollections of the departed friend and father, whose demise has awakened so many feelings of tender veneration; and such is my estimate of his character. He was a large-minded, heavenly-minded, wise, prudent, active, industrious, indefatigable labourer in the vineyard of his Lord. I feel myself largely a debtor to his memory for many a lesson of wisdom, and many a bright example of holiness. When he was taken up into heaven, I never felt more disposed to cry out, in the language of Elisha, "My father, my father, the chariot of Israel and the horsemen thereof!" O that the mantle of this great and good man might fall, not on one only, but upon all the ministry of our beloved Church! Farewell! beloved and honoured father, farewell! We shall see thee again, not enfeebled by age, and emaciated by disease, as when we took leave of thee; but renovated and adorned with immortal youth, clothed with a body like to the Redeemer's glorified body, divested of all imperfection, and showing death completely swallowed up in victory. May you and I, my dear brother, through the riches of

sovereign grace, be humble partakers in the end, of the same victory! And may you be enabled to discharge the responsible duty which the providence of God has devolved upon you, of giving to the public the life of this venerated man, in such a manner as to render that work a rich and permanent blessing to all his successors in the sacred office who shall read it!

So prays your sincere friend and brother in Christian bonds,

SAMUEL MILLER.

*Princeton, September 25, 1848.*