

CENTENNIAL BIOGRAPHY.

MEN OF MARK

OF

CUMBERLAND VALLEY, PA.

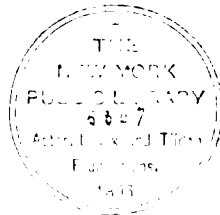
1776—1876.

ALFRED NEVIN, D. D., LL. D.

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*Johann Sebastian Bach*

## JOHN HOLMES AGNEW, D. D.



THE REV. JOHN HOLMES AGNEW was born in Gettysburg, Pa., May 9th, 1804. Of his father, who subsequently removed to Harrisburg, and whose fame as a physician reached far beyond the range of his practice, a sketch is given elsewhere in this volume. Young Holmes's teacher at Harrisburg, writes, "He was a good boy, of good abilities, and learned well and rapidly." He graduated at Dickinson College, under the presidency of the distinguished Dr. John Mason, and taught the grammar school in Carlisle for some time after leaving the college.

Mr. Agnew pursued his theological studies in the seminary at Princeton, and was licensed to preach the Gospel by the Presbytery of Carlisle, April 11th, 1827. Having received and accepted a call to the pastorate of the Presbyterian Church in Uniontown, Pa, he was dismissed to the Presbytery of Redstone, October 29th, 1827. He was married to Miss Sarah Emeline Taylor, of Newark, N. J., April 18th, 1829. On account of a nervous affection which always seized him severely after preaching, and from which he never could get relief during his life, he had to abandon in a great measure the duties of the pulpit, and consequently resigned his pastoral relation to the church at Uniontown, after discharging its duties for a short time as efficiently and acceptably as his failing health would permit. A. W. Boyd, Esq., of that place, in a letter, says, "I find those who were members of the church during Mr. Agnew's pastorate, remember him with a great deal of pleasure. All say he was greatly beloved by the people, was an excellent pastor, and a very instructive and interesting preacher, a man of deep piety, and it was felt to be a great calamity to the church when he left."

After relinquishing pastoral work, Mr. Agnew was elected Professor of Languages in Washington College, Pa., January 12th, 1831. This position he resigned September 26th, 1832, on account of inadequacy of salary. The degree of Doctor of Divinity was conferred upon him by this institution in 1852. The Rev. George P. Hays, D. D., its present President, in writing to a friend, says: "He is spoken of here by those who knew him, as a gentleman of very high scholarship and excellent ability as a teacher. He probably made as much reputation in the short time he was here as any man who was ever connected

with the college, in an equal length of time. His departure from the college was deeply regretted by both the Faculty and the Trustees."

After leaving Washington, which he did on account of inadequacy of salary, Prof. Agnew became connected with the German Reformed Institution in York, Pa. He was then elected a Professor in Marion College, Missouri, where he remained until the institution was dissolved, and subsequently he was chosen to a similar position in Newark College, Delaware, from which he withdrew, as did some other professors also, because the funds for the institution were raised by lottery. Next he became editor of the Eclectic Magazine, and the Biblical Repertory, a quarterly in the interest of the (then) New School Branch of the Presbyterian Church, with which he was connected.

After having had charge of a Female Seminary in Philadelphia for a few years, Dr. Agnew became Professor of the Ancient Languages, in the University of Michigan, in 1845, retiring from this position, in which he established his reputation as a thorough scholar, in 1852. He then selected as his field of labour and usefulness, Maplewood Female Seminary, Pittsfield, Mass. In reference to this portion of his history, the Rev. C. V. Spear, A. M., present Principal of that institution, thus writes :

"Professor Agnew became a partner and co-principal in the conduct of this Seminary some time during the Academic year of 1852-3. The school was enjoying a very good degree of success when he became connected with it, and remained one of the prominent institutions of the state while he was its sole Principal, as it has since. Its *name*, now and for all the years since he was here, was given by him. He was very highly esteemed by the pupils and patrons of the school, as a man of rare geniality and elegance of manners in social life, and thorough scholarship and cultivated taste—eminently fitted in many respects for his post here and its multiform duties, and lacking only in health, and a certain financial sharpness too often incompatible with the highest culture and intellectual ability. He possessed, in a rare degree, that high hopefulness which is so necessary to the commencement and the prosecution of any undertaking that is at all difficult and worthy of high ambition; and with adequate support would, but for failing health, have continued his work here much longer without doubt. His pupils, and the teachers and professors in the school, were very warmly attached to him, and among other reasons, for the unflinching kindness, forbearance and urbanity, that characterized all his intercourse with them. I need not say, what no doubt many voices will

utter, that while many men in posts of honour are feared, and others respected, he was a man to be both honoured and loved. I recall, as I write, the presentation of a beautiful vase of silver—I think the gift of the teachers and professors—as a testimonial of their high esteem and affection for him, at the Summer Anniversary of 1856. The sincere warmth of the devotion then expressed was no transient feeling, and his retiring a year later was deeply regretted by many friends.”

It may here be added that all Dr. Agnew's friends earnestly wished that he had retained his position at Pittsfield. After abandoning it, which he did, no doubt, from a desire to make himself more able to do good, and from other influences, he was induced, through his too great readiness to trust in his fellow-men, to engage in some speculations, from which, however, he would, in all probability, have come out safely but for disasters which overtook them by reason of the war, and made them issue in total loss.

In addition to the literary labours of Dr. Agnew, to which we have already referred, he was also editor of *The Knickerbocker*; the author of a small and valuable work on “The Sabbath,” from the press of the Presbyterian Board of Publication; and assisted in the translation of Winer's Grammar of the New Testament. Whilst, too, occupying positions of mere literary responsibility, we find him using his graceful pen in efforts to do good in the religious sphere. During his Professorship at Newark, he contributed an excellent sermon to the *National Preacher*, on “Motives and Means of Peace to the Churches.”

Dr. Agnew died of bilious fever, at Peeksville, N. Y., October 12th, 1865. His character is thus succinctly delineated by one who knew him thoroughly: “He was generous, benevolent, social, genial, gentlemanly, scholarly.”