

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.

PREPARED FOR THE PRESS AT THE AUTHOR'S REQUEST

BY JOSEPH H. JONES,

PASTOR OF THE SIXTH PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, PHILADELPHIA.

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In the office of the Clerk of the District Court for the Eastern
District of Pennsylvania.

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."

you in your retirement, to make it in all respects comfortable to you, to satisfy you with length of days; and finally to receive you into happiness and glory infinitely greater than this world can bestow.

WM. WHITE,	JOHN ANDREWS,
ASHBEL GREEN,	J. F. SCHMIDT,
WM. SMITH,	ROBERT BLACKWELL,
JOHN EWING,	WM. ROGERS,
SAMUEL JONES,	THOMAS USTICK,
WM. HENDEL,	ANDREW HUNTER,
SAMUEL MAGAW,	JOHN DICKINS,
HENRY HELMUTH,	J. JONES,
SAMUEL BLAIR,	JOSEPH TURNER,
NICOLAS COLLIN,	EZEKIEL COOPER,
ROBERT ANNAN,	MORGAN J. RHEES,
WM. MARSHALL,	JAS. ABERCROMBIE,
JOHN MEDER.	

Philadelphia, *March 3d*, 1797.

TO THE CLERGY OF DIFFERENT DENOMINATIONS RESIDING IN AND NEAR THE CITY OF PHILADELPHIA.

Gentlemen—Not to acknowledge with gratitude and sensibility the affectionate addresses and benevolent wishes of my fellow-citizens, on my retiring from public life, would prove that I have been unworthy of the confidence which they have been pleased to repose in me.

And among those public testimonies of attachment and approbation, none can be more grateful than that of so respectable a body as yours.

Believing, as I do, that *Religion and Morality are the essential* pillars of civil society, I view, with unspeakable pleasure, that harmony and brotherly love which characterize the clergy of different denominations, as well in this, as in other parts of the United States; exhibiting to the world a new and interesting spectacle, at once the pride of our country and the surest basis of universal harmony.

That your labours for the good of mankind may be crowned with success; that your temporal enjoyments may be commensurate with your merits; and that the future reward of good and faithful servants may be yours, I shall not cease to supplicate the Divine Author of life and felicity.

GEO. WASHINGTON.

(F.)

The writer is not aware of there being in print any other record of this venerated servant of Christ, than the tender and beautiful sketch which was furnished by Dr. Green in the discourse preached on the occasion of his lamented death by the yellow fever, October 18, 1793. It is a gem which will add to the beauty and richness of the volume, and which we take great pleasure in preserving.

“Time will not permit me to give so full a sketch of the life and character of Dr. Sproat, as my inclination would lead me to attempt. You knew him well; and as the principal things which will be mentioned fell under your observation as well as mine, you will be witnesses that what I speak is the unexaggerated truth.

“At the College of Yale, in the state of Connecticut, he early received a liberal education. While he was pursuing his academical studies, he met with that change in his temper and views which determined him to devote his life to the ministry of the gospel, and which, we doubt not, has prepared him for the exercises and enjoyments of the heavenly state. The instrument of this work lies there before you sleeping in the dust.* Or, to speak more properly, is now rejoicing with him whom we lament in the kingdom of glory. His own relation to me of the circumstance here

* Mr. Tennent is interred in the broad aisle of the church.

alluded to was nearly thus: ‘Mr. Gilbert Tennent, the founder of our church, in his memorable tour through the eastern States, preached, among other places, at the college where I then was—a careless, unthinking youth. I had never seen or known of him before. But the power of God seemed to go with him wherever he went, and the first sermon that I heard him deliver made impressions on my soul that have never been effaced.’ It is pleasing to remark and remember such a circumstance as this; to observe how one faithful minister of the gospel is made instrumental in raising up another, and of providing himself with an immediate and pious successor, in a place far distant from the scene of his stated ministrations. As this event also happened a considerable space before the congregation of which they both had the charge, and which was so dear to both, was organized or collected, we are led to observe how the great Head of the Church takes care for its supply and edification beyond the utmost reach of human views; and that a laborious servant of Jesus Christ may perform some of his most essential services at a time and in a manner wholly unknown to himself.

“Dr. Sproat was first ordained a minister of the gospel at Guilford, in Connecticut. During the revival of religion in this country between forty and fifty years ago, he was abundant in labours, distinguished in his zeal, highly popular, and greatly blessed. From Guilford, the call of this church brought him to this city, and gave us the advantages of his piety and fidelity in his Master’s cause. Between his first congregation and his second, his life, as a minister, was almost equally divided. Nearly the exact space of twenty-five years was spent in each.

“In his natural temper he used often to tell me he was easily susceptible of passion. If it was so, it is certain, like the sage of antiquity,* *he was remarkable for his victory over it*, and for those virtues which are its opposites. Patience, moderation, indulgence, and forbearance were leading features in his general character. Meekness and affection distinguished him highly. Not only in the near relations of husband, father and master, did they render him most dear and exemplary; but in all his intercourse with the world they shone out in the mildest and most amiable light. His candour, charity and tenderness, appeared on all occasions, and gained him in a peculiar degree the respect and affection of almost all descriptions of persons. He was free from all disguise. He was ‘an Israelite indeed in whom there was no guile.’ You saw at once the man you would always see. Such a man was peculiarly formed for lasting friendship and unreserved confidence. They could scarcely be avoided by one who was often with him. Between him and myself, therefore, they subsisted in a manner which fills me with a mournful pleasure to recollect, and the loss of which I most sensibly realize and deplore. In a collegiate charge of nearly seven years, not one cold, or distant, or formal word ever passed between us; not the slightest alienation interrupted our harmony. On all occasions he treated me like a father, and like a father I can truly say, I loved and honoured him. His usual appellation in addressing me was, *my son*; and had I been his son by the ties of nature, as well as in the bonds of the gospel, he could scarcely have treated me with more affection, or more sincerely regarded my interest as his own. These declarations are the tribute of justice, of duty, and of gratitude, which I owe to his memory. I owe it indeed a thousand times more than this—a thousand recollections of kindness fill my mind and affect my heart while I am speaking of him. I can never forget them; but I must now forbear to speak farther of them.

“In scholastic attainments he was a good proficient. Of those which are denominated the learned languages, he was a considerable master. He loved all the pursuits and interests of science; and I have heard him lament that his urgent calls to active service in early life, left him so little time to become accurate in some of the departments of literature.

“In the study of divinity he had made a progress which was truly great and enviable. It was his delight, and he pursued it incessantly. A man has seldom

* Socrates.

been seen who had a more complete knowledge, or a more familiar acquaintance with the holy Scriptures. His great readiness in quoting and applying them in a pertinent manner in his public addresses, you have all of you observed, and many of you, I trust, will remember, as the means of your spiritual edification. He had made deep researches into systematic, casuistic, and polemic divinity. On these subjects he read much in some of the last years of his life. 'My own sentiments,' said he, 'in regard to the essentials of religion, I believe are fixed; but I find much entertainment, and, I think, some advantage in reading books of this description.'

"In his discourses from the pulpit he loved to dwell on the fundamental and peculiar doctrines of the gospel, which he regarded as a system of pure grace and mercy, abasing the sinner to the dust and exalting God in the highest. When the train of his address led him to speak on the experimental part of religion, he was excellent and edifying in a singular degree. 'He shunned not to declare the whole counsel of God,' intreating, warning, and persuading souls in the most serious, plain, affectionate and pressing manner, to 'flee from the wrath to come.' His public prayers were remarkable for a vein of piety and fervour seldom equalled. He had a certain copiousness of expression and engagedness of manner in this divine service, which could arise from no other source than the familiar intercourse of his own soul with heaven.

"In his personal religion he was truly eminent. His life and example exhibited a most amiable view of the influence and efficacy of the gospel principles on the human heart and character. Unfeigned humility, that ornament of every other grace, had become a habit of his soul, and appeared in all his deportment. Having studied long and made great proficiency in the school of Christ, he had learned the hard lesson of thinking in a very lowly manner of himself. His charity for others was uncommonly extensive. It led him to hope the best where there was any probability on which hope could be founded. His faith was built on the sure foundations of the gospel, and it supported his soul in the most trying hour. In some of his last moments he said, 'all my expectations for eternity rest on the infinite grace of God, abounding through the finished righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ.' He was a pattern of patience and resignation. The painful infirmities of age, under which he laboured for a considerable time before his death, he bore with a cheerful fortitude. Since the twenty-third day of August last, he had been looking for death, and ripening for it with uncommon speed. On that day he completed half a century of years in the character of an ordained minister of the gospel; and thence forward to the time of his death, the larger portion of his waking hours were spent in the immediate acts of devotion, or of devout meditations and aspirations of soul.* He endured the severe distress which was inflicted on his family without the least repining.† At the funeral of a dear son, he might with peculiar propriety use the language, for he eminently possessed the spirit, of Job.‡

"His death was easy, and he was rational to the last. A short time before he expired, and after he had lost the power of speech, being asked if he felt the supports of religion, he answered by the signal of lifting up his hands and his eyes to heaven.

"The respect which was shown to his remains, at a time which precluded it in

* This is confirmed not only by the observation and testimony of those who were most about him, but by what appears in his own diary. This diary exhibits one of the most instructing views of the exercises and temper of a Christian, especially when under affliction, that perhaps has ever been seen.

† His eldest son, with his wife and youngest daughter, died within the space of a month. The doctor himself and Mrs. Sproat, were added to the number in less than a month afterwards.

‡ Enfeebled and trembling with age, the doctor followed the corpse of his son to the grave, and after it was deposited, leaning on his staff, he pronounced only these words: "The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away, blessed be the name of the Lord." Amen!

almost every other instance, was a proof of the high esteem in which he was held.* It was a proof also, that there are circumstances in which acknowledged and distinguished piety, will secure that which wealth cannot purchase, nor worldly influence command. To the generous Africans who carried him to his grave, I here make a return of public thanks. Thus lived, and thus has died, the late worthy pastor of this church. His life was filled up with piety and fidelity, and the last scene of it was closed with peculiar honour and dignity. Having never sullied the profession which he made, or the character which he bore, he retired from the world like a venerable champion of the gospel of Christ. One of his brethren, considerably advanced in life himself, writing to me on the subject of his death, says, ‘I sincerely mourn with you and the churches the death of your colleague. But he had lived to a good old age.† He had lived a life of usefulness and reputation, and, what was a rich blessing, he had not outlived his usefulness. O, let us double our diligence and ‘work while our day lasts.’”

(G.)

The response to Dr. Miller, speaking in the name and behalf of the Trustees of the College, was as follows, viz :

RESPONSIO.

Quandoquidem, viri doctissimi et præstantissimi, vos mihi hoc munus honestum et præclarum confidistis, quid restat, nisi ut officio, sic amplissime collato, fungi obnixè conarer. Eequidem cum operis designati magnitudinem contemplor, formido; et de mea facultate illud conficiendi dubito, sane potius despero. Recordatus, attamen, Christi oraculi, Ἀρετὴ σὺ ἡ χάρις μου ἢ χάρις δύναμις μου ἐν ἀσθενείᾳ τελειουταί, consolor; animus mihi additur, et ad rem propositam me alacriter accingo.

Faxit Deus optimus maximus, ut ad res secundas nostri collegii, ad prolationem finium ecclesiæ christianæ, denique ad gloriam nominis sanctissimi, factum conducatur.

(H.)

A Report to the Trustees of the College of New Jersey, relative to a Revival of Religion among the students of said College, in the winter and spring of the year 1815. By Ashbel Green, D.D. LL.D., President of the College. Published by order of the Board of Trustees.

It has for some time been the practice of the President of the College of New Jersey to make a written report to the Board of Trustees, at each of their semi-annual meetings, on the state of the College. The following statement made a part of such a report, without any expectation, when it was drawn up, that it

* During the late distressing scenes which were witnessed in this city, the almost universal mode of conveying a corpse to the grave, was in a hearse or a cart; and the attendants consisted only of the person who drove the carriage, the grave digger, or a negro hired for the purpose, and, in a few instances, two or three mourning friends. But in the case of Dr. Sproat, there was a procession and bearers of the dead; which, as it was more striking to the beholders, in the circumstances in which it happened, than the most splendid funeral that perhaps the city ever produced, so it was a much stronger proof of the affection which was felt for the deceased, than the greatest parade in ordinary times can possibly be. The pious people who had met in the church for prayer, formed a procession of about fifty persons, and some religious negroes voluntarily offered to carry the bier.

† Dr. Sproat entered on his 72d year in April, 1793. He was born at Scituate, in the state of Massachusetts, April 11th, 1722, O. S.