



32101 067015923

ADDRESS

AT THE FUNERAL OF

REV. ALEXANDER TAGGART MCGILL, D.D., LL.D.,

IN PRINCETON, JAN. 16, 1889.

Subsequently repeated, by request, before the Ministerial
Association in Philadelphia.

BY

REV. W. HENRY GREEN, D.D., LL.D.

RECAP

P96
4838

11

36
4838
11

Princeton University
Library



Library of



Princeton University.

Presented by

Dr. J. M. Baldwin.



Generated at Library of Congress on 2021-01-19 02:16 GMT / https://hdl.handle.net/2027/njp.32101067015923
Public Domain in the United States; Google-digitized / http://www.hathitrust.org/access_use#pd-us-google

ADDRESS

AT THE FUNERAL OF

REV. ALEXANDER TAGGART MCGILL, D.D., LL.D.,

IN PRINCETON, JAN. 16, 1889.

Subsequently repeated, by request, before the Ministerial
Association in Philadelphia.

BY

REV. W. HENRY GREEN, D.D., LL.D.

UNIVERSITY
LIBRARY
PRINCETON N.J.

YTD93VINU
YR98BU
L.M. NOTEDM99

REV. ALEXANDER TAGGART MCGILL, D.D., LL.D.

There is a congruity in which the mind rests with satisfaction when the servants of God are crowned with length of days ; when they fall asleep after having fulfilled their course, having completed the full measure of human life and having accomplished a prosperous, useful and honored career. There is a gloom inseparable from death and the grave ; there are pangs of separation from beloved and cherished friends which no circumstances can altogether relieve. We cannot but feel the shock at seeing the once animated form now pallid and still, and witnessing the execution of the stern and inexorable decree that the dust must return to dust. But there is everything in the present instance to mitigate the stroke of the fell destroyer. It is not as when the young are unexpectedly snatched away in budding life, full of promise and hope, and their bright prospects are suddenly darkened, and fond anticipations, which seemed on the point of being realized, are forever crushed. Nor is it as when life has been an unsuccessful struggle with adverse circumstances, and there has been a constant record of disappointments and baffled hopes and failing schemes. Nor was there any approach to those melancholy instances in which the pitiable spectacle of a failure of faculties and an enfeebled intellect has cast a shadow over the later years of a protracted life in those who had been honored and cherished.

Our venerable friend was spared to reach an age considerably beyond the ordinary term of human life. From early manhood he has filled important positions with credit and success, until a comparatively recent period. And when admonished by increasing physical debility to withdraw from public duty, his intellectual vigor was un-

1338
JAN -7 1905
188177
(RECAP)

abated and he continued still his literary occupation in fields congenial to his taste and familiar from his previous studies. This is the more remarkable as his frail and delicate constitution, his attenuated frame and bodily weakness might have appeared to indicate that his life would be short and to restrict his activity within a very narrow range.

Alexander Taggart McGill was born February 24, 1807, two days after the seventy-fifth anniversary of the birth of George Washington. It may remind us how eventful have been the eighty-two years of this venerated life to recall that at the date of his birth not quite nineteen years had elapsed since the adoption of the Constitution of the United States. The third President, Thomas Jefferson, was then in his second term. But four new states—Vermont, Kentucky, Tennessee and Ohio—had been added to the original thirteen; and the entire population of this country at the succeeding census in 1810 was but $7\frac{1}{4}$ millions.

The nineteenth General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church met that year in what was then its accustomed place, the City of Philadelphia. And by what now seems a very curious coincidence, Rev. Archibald Alexander (he was not yet Doctor of Divinity) was the Moderator of the Assembly, and Rev. Dr. Samuel Miller, as the last preceding Moderator, preached the opening sermon. Princeton Seminary was not founded until five years later. But its first two professors assisted at the organization of the Assembly in the year that the late venerable professor was born, who served the institution nearly as long as they.

The growth of the Presbyterian Church in the interval is shown by the fact that at that time there were seven Synods and twenty-nine Presbyteries reporting three hundred and thirty ministers, five hundred and ninety-eight churches, thirty-five licentiates, 17,871 communicants, and collections amounting to \$4,641. The statistics of last year indicate that there are now twenty-eight Synods, 202 Presbyteries, 5,789 ministers, 6,543 churches, 997 candidates for

the ministry, 314 licentiates, 722,071 communicants, and collections are reported amounting to \$12,818,682. The growth of great Christian enterprises during the period which we have under review will be sufficiently suggested by a few significant facts. The oldest Bible Society in Christendom, the British and Foreign Bible Society, was organized in 1804, but three years before Dr. McGill was born. The Bible Society of the City of Philadelphia dates from 1808, and the American Bible Society, located in New York City, only from 1816. The first of the great missionary societies of this country for propagating the gospel among the heathen, the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions, was founded in 1810, when young McGill was three years of age.

The future professor was of unpretentious parentage, of Scotch-Irish descent, and trained in the Seceder branch of the Presbyterian Church. His early years were passed in his native town of Canonsburg, Pa., where he graduated at Jefferson College at the age of nineteen as the valedictorian of his class, and for two years subsequently was engaged as tutor of Latin in that institution. During this time he entered privately upon the study of Hebrew and of Theology.

He was naturally of a feeble constitution, and throughout the whole of his long life he was never physically robust and vigorous. So precarious was his health during his boyhood and youth, that his studies were frequently interrupted in consequence. At length the development of threatening symptoms filled him and his friends with uneasiness and obliged him to seek a milder climate. He went to Milledgeville, Georgia, and there took charge of the Baldwin Academy and at the same time commenced the study of law with ex-Gov. Mitchell. This led to an episode in his life which brought him into connection with exciting events, and served to manifest the qualities for which he was already conspicuous, and might have given a different complexion to his whole subsequent life. The state of Georgia, having resolved upon

the removal of the Cherokees from the territory, which they had up to that time occupied, appointed a commission to survey their lands. Mr. McGill, then 23 years of age, had been the clerk of the Georgia House of Assembly during the first year of his residence in the state, and was designated as one of this commission. In the excitement of the time there seemed great danger of armed collision. Mr. McGill and one other of the commissioners were selected to begin this perilous work by running a preliminary line as a base for the subsequent operations of the rest. So threatening was the attitude of the Cherokees that his associate shrank from the task assigned him, and Mr. McGill, accordingly, performed it without his aid, at no small personal risk ; but by tact and suavity on the one hand, joined with firmness and intrepidity on the other, he managed to conduct it to a successful termination. The manner in which this trying duty was achieved, won for him no small amount of praise. And this, together with the friendship and favor of prominent men, which he was fortunate enough to secure, opened before him flattering prospects of political preferment and of an extensive legal practice, to which he then thought of devoting himself, having completed the study of law during his residence in the South and been already admitted to the bar.

With the improvement of his health, however, under the genial influence of a milder climate, he returned again to his original purpose. To this conclusion his providential connection with the surveying expedition already mentioned contributed not a little. In the execution of that work he was led to Missionary Ridge, a summit since famous for deeds of noble daring during the late civil war, but which was then occupied by those devoted men who had given their lives to the instruction of the Cherokees in the Gospel of Christ. While sharing their generous hospitality, beholding their noble work and holding free intercourse with them, he solemnly resolved that he would make preaching Christ the business of his life.

He gave up his secular pursuits and, in the absence of railroads

or any satisfactory public conveyance, made his journey back to Canonsburg, seven hundred miles, on horseback. He now entered the Seceder Seminary there, of which he was wont to speak as the oldest Theological Seminary in the United States, and consecrated himself afresh to the work of the ministry. This was to be thenceforth the labor of his life, in the two successive spheres of pastor and professor, in each of which he achieved high distinction.

After a year spent in missionary work he was ordained in 1835 by the Seceder Synod, the body in which he had been brought up, and which has since been united with the Associate Reformed body under the name of the United Presbyterian Church. His first settlement was at Carlisle, Pa., over four feeble and rather unpromising churches in Cumberland and Perry Counties, and with the meagre salary of \$450 per annum. After two years of diligent, and by no means unproductive labor, he was invited to take charge of a new organization in Philadelphia, where he preached for six months.

So vigorous at that time was the discipline maintained by the Seceders that he incurred the censure of his brethren by preaching in the Second Presbyterian Church of Carlisle, where hymns were usually sung, although before he had accepted the invitation to preach he had stipulated that Rouse's version should be used in the service. His preaching was followed by a call from the Second Church and the simultaneous serving of a notice of charges against him in the Seceder Presbytery. He paid no attention to the proceedings against him further than to ask to be dismissed to the Presbytery of Carlisle in connection with the old school of General Assembly. This was refused, and by a vote of two ministers and three elders he was suspended from the ministry. The Presbytery of Carlisle, however, would not recognize the validity of this suspension, and at once admitted him to their body and placed the call in his hands which he accepted. Here he continued as pastor, with great acceptance and success, until he was elected

Generated at Library of Congress on 2021-01-19 02:16 GMT / https://hdl.handle.net/2027/njp.32101067015923 / http://www.hathitrust.org/access_use#pd-us-google
Public Domain in the United States; Google-digitized

by the suffrages of the General Assembly in 1842 to a professorship in the Theological Seminary at Allegheny.

The name of the Rev. A. T. McGill first appears in the appendix to the Assembly's minutes of 1839 as pastor of the church at Carlisle. This was the year that the semi-centennial of the organization of the General Assembly was celebrated. The next year, 1840, he was himself sent as a delegate to the General Assembly and was by that body appointed a member of the Committee on Foreign Correspondence along with Drs. Janeway, Thornwell and others. He was also elected a member of the Board of Missions and was made the chairman of a committee to prepare a circular letter in relation to foreign missions, which was adopted and printed in the appendix to the minutes.

Dr. McGill was admirably fitted for the work of a pastor, and it is not surprising that he was greatly beloved by the people of his charge, who sought to recall him from his professorship after he had entered upon it, and among whom his memory was long and warmly cherished. To a deep interest in their spiritual welfare and fidelity in declaring to them the whole counsel of God he joined dignified yet most attractive manners, a polished and graceful ease in conversation, a ready faculty of saying what it was pleasant to hear in the most agreeable way, so that he promptly gained the ear and won the regard of those with whom he came in contact. And to this popularity the lovely wife of his youth, to whom he was married during his earliest pastorate, and whose gentle, winning manners, sweet disposition and great excellence of character are well remembered wherever she was known, greatly contributed.

In the pulpit Dr. McGill possessed unwonted power. His public prayers gained much impressiveness not only from the spirit of devotion which pervaded them, but from the fact that they were to so great an extent framed out of the very words of Scripture, and particularly of the Psalms, which he had at ready command and which, whatever was the subject of supplication or whatever was the

theme that occupied his thoughts, he constantly introduced in a most appropriate and effective manner. As a preacher he was always interesting, and when at his best, particularly in his prime, he was truly eloquent. His well-rounded and sonorous periods, his finely modulated voice, emphatic utterance and animated manner gave great effect to his discourse, which was always evangelical and earnest and dealt in the most serious themes. His services were much in demand, particularly on special and anniversary occasions. Perhaps one of the most marked exhibitions of his oratorical ability and his power to chain the attention of a popular assembly and to hold their interest without flagging to a train of connected argument and historical research was shown in his memorable discussion, continued through several successive weeks, with Bishop O'Connor, of Pittsburg, on questions at issue between Roman Catholics and Protestants.

Dr. McGill continued to preach, as opportunity offered, to the gratification and profit of his hearers, until, with the infirmities of advancing years, threatening symptoms developed which warned him to desist; which, however, he did not finally do until he had repeatedly fainted in the pulpit and his medical advisers solemnly charged him that he could not repeat the effort but at the peril of his life.

While Dr. McGill was fitted to shine as a pastor and as a preacher, it was in the work of a professor that his life was most largely spent and that he was to attain his greatest distinction. The steps by which this transition was effected are detailed in the following communication from Allegheny Seminary to the General Assembly in May, 1842: "At a meeting of the Board of Directors held September 8th, 1841, it was unanimously agreed to invite the Rev. Alexander T. McGill, of the Presbytery of Carlisle, to become an Instructor of Ecclesiastical History and Church Government in our institution until such time as the General Assembly should fill the chair of that department of study with a regular professor; and

during the winter session Mr. McGill has been connected with the institution in the office to which he was invited by the Board, whose duties he has fulfilled with very great acceptance. The Board now request the General Assembly, during their present session, to appoint a professor of our institution to fill the chair of Ecclesiastical History and Church Government." On the 18th of November following he was formally inducted into the office, to which he had been elected by the General Assembly. This important Seminary was then in a period of great depression, suffering for want of funds, with a diminished number of students, and its friends were greatly discouraged. Dr. John W. Nevin had resigned the professorship in 1840, which he had held for eleven years, and had accepted the invitation tendered to him by the Seminary of the German Reformed Church at Mercersburgh. Dr. David Elliot was thus left the sole remaining professor, but in spite of all discouragements he continued faithful at his post in the department of Didactic and Polemic Theology. The effort to strengthen the faculty by the election of Dr. Lewis W. Green as Professor of Oriental Literature and Biblical Criticism in the place of Dr. Nevin, and now, two years later, by the election of Dr. McGill, was felt at once in its effect upon the attendance of students and the new impetus given to the institution. The number of students reported at the time of his election was but 17; the next year it was 30; and the next 54. Dr. McGill was thus settled within a short distance of his native town, in a region whose population was largely Presbyterian, where he was well known and was regarded with unbounded confidence and admiration. During the period of his continuance in the Seminary he was reckoned one of the main pillars of its strength. And his labors on its behalf were indefatigable. The resignation of his colleague, Dr. Lewis Green, in 1846, to take charge of a church in Baltimore, threw upon him the burden of the vacant professorship in addition to his own. This he sustained until he was relieved by the election of Dr.

Jacobus, who took charge of the department of Oriental and Biblical Literature in January, 1852.

Meanwhile the load of care and toil, which Dr. McGill had carried so long in connection with this struggling institution, impaired his health and broke his spirits to such a degree that he felt obliged to resign his position in Allegheny, notwithstanding the earnest remonstrances of his colleagues and of the directors and friends of the Seminary, and try once more the effect of a Southern residence, which had proved so serviceable to him in earlier life. He accordingly accepted a chair, which was now offered to him for the second time, in the Theological Seminary at Columbia, S. C., and made experiment of it for a single year. Matters not issuing as he had hoped, he retired from this position at the termination of that period, notwithstanding the flattering reception which had been extended to him and the warmly expressed wishes of the faculty and friends of the Seminary that he should remain.

Meanwhile Allegheny invited him to return to the chair which he had left in that Seminary. A call was pending from an important church in Cincinnati, and Columbia was not without hope that he might be induced to abide there. At this time the vacancy created in Princeton Seminary by the death of the venerable Dr. Archibald Alexander in 1851, was still unfilled. Repeated attempts to fill it had proved abortive. Dr. Humphrey and Dr. Boardman, who had been elected in successive years, had each declined, and it was felt by the friends of the Seminary that another failure must not be made. Upon the assembling of the directors it was thought wise in order to secure unity of action that an informal ballot should first be cast in which each might freely indicate his preferences. This was done and a clear majority appeared for Dr. McGill. I distinctly remember meeting our Senior Professor, Dr. Charles Hodge, as he came from the room in which the directors were meeting. The result was altogether unanticipated by him. He had been deeply concerned lest there might be divided counsels and unanimity might

be impossible. He said to me with deep seriousness in recognition of the Divine ordering and with evident relief, "The hand of God is in this." An explicit understanding was had with Dr. McGill that he had positively sundered his connection both with Columbia and with Allegheny and that he was under no pledges whatever in any quarter before proceeding to prosecute the matter at the General Assembly. On the receipt of these assurances it was felt that the case was entirely clear so far as this Seminary was concerned, and that no unfriendliness or want of comity could be charged toward sister institutions. From the time of his election in 1854 until the Spring of 1883, when he withdrew from active service, Dr. McGill continued to perform the full duties of a professor in this Seminary, duties which were varied during two years, 1859 and 1860, by his giving instruction in Church History, which had belonged to his professorship in Allegheny, but during most of the time he was occupied in training the students in Practical Theology, that is to say, in preaching, the pastoral care and in church government, in each of which he was assiduous and enthusiastic. His known familiarity with ecclesiastical questions led to his being consulted constantly by his former students and by others in the perplexities which arose in the course of their actual experience, the lectures and instructions of the class room being thus supplemented largely by subsequent correspondence.

The important service which Dr. McGill rendered to this Seminary during the long period of his active connection with it was not limited to the direct duties of his professorship. He was by nature a man of affairs, ready and prompt to take part in the management and direction of the multifarious details which gather about a large institution and to which some one must give attention if they are to be properly done. Accordingly, not so much by positive arrangement as by a sort of spontaneous necessity, a large amount of the oversight of matters and many cumbersome details drifted into his willing hands and were punctually and diligently attended to.

Correspondence with students proposing to enter the Seminary or their friends, the allocation and disbursement of funds in aid of students and to a considerable extent the procuring of such funds, intercourse with students in relation to their financial necessities and other matters pertaining to them, dealings with the employees of the Seminary and interesting friends of the institution, as his large acquaintance with business men specially enabled him to do, in supplying its necessary wants; all this only indicates in the most general way the services which he rendered. The permanent endowments of the Seminary were very considerably increased by his efficient solicitation as well as important assistance obtained in meeting current expenditures.

Dr. McGill has been honored by other appointments, showing the estimation in which he was held by his ministerial brethren and by the public. He was Moderator of the old school General Assembly in 1848, and was the youngest man who had up to that time been honored by that position. He was for twelve years the permanent clerk of that body and for eight years its stated clerk; and was displaced only at the union of the two assemblies to make room for Dr. Hatfield, the stated clerk of the new school Assembly. The presidency of Lafayette College was twice offered to him; and that of Ohio University twice also. He was also invited to the presidency of Washington College, Pa., and subsequently to that of Jefferson College; all of which he declined. The degree of D. D. was conferred upon him in 1842 by Marshall College, Pa., and that of LL. D. by Princeton College in 1868.

He was a member of the committee appointed in 1857 to revise the Book of Discipline, along with Drs. Charles Hodge, Robert J. Breckenridge, James H. Thornwell, and others.

In politics he acted with the Democratic party, and was a great admirer of Mr. Buchanan, for whom he had a strong personal friendship. Notwithstanding his warm attachment to his early Southern acquaintances, he had no tolerance for the doctrine of se-

cession, but was a firm supporter of the Union and sympathized with Hon. Stephen A. Douglass in his efforts to maintain the integrity of the United States at all hazards and at any cost, and in upholding the federal government. He presided at a public meeting held in Princeton in 1864 in aid of the soldiers ; and when the news arrived of the fall of Richmond, in 1865, he delivered a speech upon the occasion from the College steps.

Dr. McGill was not ambitious to be known as an author. He published various sermons, addresses, articles in periodicals and in newspapers, but no volumes. During the last few years he was engaged in the preparation of three several treatises, which are understood to be now in press, relating to subjects in which he was deeply interested as connected with his department of instruction, and upon which he had thought profoundly, viz : Church Government and the Ordinances of Worship.

Dr. McGill was twice married. His first wife, Eleanor Atcheson McCulloch, the daughter of General George McCulloch, of Mifflin County, Pennsylvania, was the mother of eight children, and died in 1873. He was married a second time in 1875 to Catharine Bache Hodge, daughter of Dr. Charles Hodge. His eldest son, George McCulloch McGill, was a surgeon in the regular army, and was in active service throughout the civil war, dying while engaged in military duty in 1867. The youngest son, Samuel Hepburn McGill, who was engaged in the practice of law with flattering prospects in Jersey City, attended his father's funeral in apparent health, but survived him only two weeks. One child died in infancy and two sons and three daughters are still living : Alexander T. McGill, Chancellor of the State of New Jersey ; John, a practicing physician in Jersey City and Surgeon-General of the State ; Mary, wife of Rev. Joseph Gamble, of Plattsburgh, N. Y. ; Hetty, wife of C. S. Lane, Esq., of Hagerstown, Md., and Miss Nannie, who was the constant companion and faithful attendant upon her honored father during his latest years.

Nearly twenty-five years have passed since he took up his abode in Princeton. During that time his manner of life has been well known there and elsewhere. His family have grown up in this place. The domestic vicissitudes through which they have passed during their residence there, are familiar to all, and have awakened universal sympathy. The successive bereavements which have darkened that household, have saddened us all ; some of them have been peculiarly touching and attended with circumstances which more than ordinarily appealed to our deepest sensibilities.

And now the venerable patriarch himself has been laid low at the ripe age of eighty-two, full of days and full of honors. The closing scenes of this long life were peaceful and calm, in perfect keeping with his Christian profession. Early in his last sickness he resigned all care and thought of business matters and secular occupations by surrendering to one of his sons the key of his safe, and executing a formal paper empowering him to act on his behalf. From that time he scarcely ever made allusion to any of his worldly affairs. His mind was chiefly occupied with thoughts of religion and things of everlasting moment. His weak nerves and bodily ailments had on former occasions very naturally at times made him irritable and fretful, which those will be best able to understand who have suffered in a similar way themselves. But during the whole of this last sickness, which was at times very distressing, and in his weak condition hard to bear, it was remarked that not a murmur escaped his lips, and not a symptom of impatience was shown at any time. More consideration was manifested for the comfort of those attending upon him, and apprehension lest they might suffer from exposure and fatigue, than he displayed in regard to his own condition. Passages of scripture dwelt upon his mind and he occupied himself in following out their meaning and developing their lessons. Particularly those glowing words of the Apostle Paul in his enumeration of Christian duties in his epistle to the Romans were frequently repeated by him : " Rejoicing in hope ; patient in tribulation ;

continuing instant in prayer." And he was so impressed by their fullness and their preciousness, that he expressed regret that he had never preached a sermon from that verse. It was my privilege to stand at his bedside but three days before his death, when all about him supposed that the end was nearer than it really was. He received me with his usual smile and with friendly pressure of his hand. He greeted me in his ordinary manner and with as much calmness as if he had been in perfect health. He said, "I am very weak, but I am resting on the sure foundation. I am trusting in my Saviour." The whole scene was suggestive of nearness to heaven. One could not but offer the prayer, "Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his." At half-past five o'clock in the morning of the Sabbath, January 13, he gently breathed his last and entered into rest.



175-76

