

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.

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JACOB GREEN.*

1745—1790.

JACOB GREEN, a son of Jacob and Dorothy (Lynde) Green, was born at Malden, Mass., on the 22d of January, (O. S.) 1722. He lost his father when he was about a year and a half old, after which, his mother was married to John Barret, also a resident of Malden. When he had reached the age of about seven, his parents removed from Malden to Killingly, Conn., and he accompanied them. At fourteen, he chose a guardian, and was put out to a trade. Having lived about nine months with a Mr. Green of Killingly, and about a year with an uncle at Stoneham, and another year with another uncle at Malden, and having, from some peculiar circumstances, failed, in each case, of being bound out till he was twenty-one, it was proposed to him by a brother-in-law who had come from Connecticut, that he should endeavour to obtain a collegiate education. He caught eagerly at the idea; and an arrangement was soon made by which he could so far anticipate his patrimony, which lay in real estate, as to proceed at once to the accomplishment of his object. Just before he had completed his seventeenth year, he entered a grammar school, and pursued his studies till July, 1740, when he was admitted a member of Harvard College, at the age of eighteen and a half.

Under the influence of the excellent instructions and example of his mother, his mind was early directed to the subject of religion, and sometimes he had deeply serious feelings, and formed resolutions in favour of a religious life; but his evil propensities, aided by powerful temptations, prevailed over his better purposes; and his experience, for several years, was little better than a constant conflict between the power of conscience and the power of sin,—the latter, however, always gaining the victory. The clergyman, in whose family he resided, while he was fitting for College, having gathered from some incidental remark that fell from him, that he was not altogether indifferent to religion, came to him shortly after, and told him that he should propound him the next day for admission to the church; and though the young man was shocked at the suggestion,—not having at all contemplated such an act, he yielded to the proposal, and was actually received to Communion. He seems, for some time after, to have had little comfort in his religious exercises; and he ultimately had no doubt that, at that period, he was deceived in regard to his true character.

Not long after he entered College, Whitefield made his first visit to New England, and preached at Cambridge, among other places. Young Green heard him with wonder and delight, and he actually followed him, listening to his sermons, from place to place, as far as Leicester, where he left him, and went to visit his mother at Killingly. This was the last visit he paid to his mother, as she died in 1741. On his return to College, he found but little sympathy with his own religious feelings among the students, though about a dozen of them formed themselves into a religious society, and met once a week for devotional exercises. The state of things, however, soon underwent a great change; for, in January, 1741, Gilbert Tennent, whose

* Autobiography, &c., in the Christian Advocate, X.—Webster's MSS.

preaching tour through New England is one of the well known events of that period, came to Cambridge, and produced, by his ministrations, both in and out of the College, a most powerful religious excitement. Previous to this time, Mr. Green had allowed himself to hope that he had been the subject of a radical change; but, under the preaching of Tennent, he was led to account that experience as delusion. His exercises, for some time after this, were of the most awful and agonizing kind; but he was brought at length to repose in the mercy of God through Christ; and found great joy and peace in believing. His mind gradually settled into a calm and equable frame, though, from a portion of the record of his religious exercises which still remains, it seems to have been habitually in a high state of spirituality and devotion. And yet it is somewhat remarkable that, with all his glowing zeal, he had little disposition to take part in public religious exercises; and when he attempted it, he found, for the most part, neither freedom nor enjoyment.

He pursued his studies, during the whole of his college life, with most untiring diligence; and though he had an uncommonly vigorous constitution, it was considerably impaired by his excessive application and neglect of exercise. His studies, however, never interfered with his devotions—every thing else he regarded as subordinate to the cultivation of a spiritual mind. He was admitted to the degree of Bachelor of Arts in July, 1744. Among his classmates were Dr. Mayhew, Bishop Bass, and the Hon. Thomas Cushing, a distinguished statesman of the Revolution.

As his patrimony had been nearly or quite exhausted by his education, he found it necessary, on leaving College, to betake himself to some employment, as a means of support. Accordingly, he accepted an invitation to teach a school at Sutton, Mass., where he remained for nearly a year. Before the year had expired, he was earnestly solicited by some of his friends to commence preaching, and the committee of a vacant congregation actually applied for his services. He was not then licensed, nor at all predisposed to be; but that he might not mistake in respect to his duty, he determined to ask the advice of a minister in or near Boston, in whose judgment he had great confidence; and, on referring the matter to him, he was advised to defer entering the ministry till he had devoted a year or two to preparation for it. In this opinion he cordially acquiesced.

Having closed his school at Sutton, and being on a visit to his friends, waiting to know what might be the indications of Providence in respect to him, Whitefield, happening to pass through that part of the country, invited him to accompany him to Georgia, to take charge of his Orphan House. He accepted the invitation, and promised to meet Whitefield in New York, within about a month from that time, and proceed with him to his Southern destination. Accordingly, he followed him in due time, and overtook him at Elizabethtown, N. J., but was disappointed to learn from him that he had received letters from Georgia, informing him of the failure of certain subscriptions, in consequence of which he should not be able to manage the Orphan House as he had expected. He told him, however, that if he chose to go on with him, he would fulfil his agreement with him for half a year, or if he chose to stop, he would defray the expense of his journey thus far. Having consulted Mr. Dickinson, at whose house he found Whitefield, he determined, on the whole, to accept the latter side of the alternative; and then, by the advice of Mr. Dickinson, and Mr. Burr of Newark, he was

induced to remain in that region, and receive license to preach. Accordingly, he was licensed in September, 1745, at Elizabethtown, and was immediately invited to preach at Hanover, Morris County. Here he preached a year on probation, received a call to settle, and was ordained and installed, in November, 1746. Some months previous to his ordination, he fell into deep spiritual darkness, and had, at one time, nearly determined to abandon the ministry, from a conscious unfitness to pursue it; but a conversation with Mr. Burr relieved him, in a good degree, of his apprehensions, and encouraged him to persevere in the work which he had undertaken.

In June, 1747, Mr. Green was married to Anna Strong of Brookhaven, L. I. She died of consumption in November, 1756. By this marriage he had four children. In October, 1757, he was married, a second time, to Elizabeth, daughter of the Rev. John Pierson of Woodbridge, N. J., and granddaughter of the Rev. Abraham Pierson, first President of Yale College. By this latter marriage he had six children,—one of whom was the Rev. Dr. Ashbel Green, President of the College of New Jersey. His second wife survived him many years, and died in August, 1810.

Mr. Green received but a slender support from his congregation, and, during the first twelve years of his ministry, kept himself, as far as possible, from being entangled with worldly cares. After that, feeling the necessity of making some provision for his family, he engaged, to some extent, in secular business,—chiefly in the practice of medicine, which he continued some thirty years. The physician and the minister he found little difficulty in uniting; but engagements of a more decidedly worldly character he considered as interfering with his ministerial comfort and usefulness.

In 1764, there was a powerful revival of religion in his congregation, which extended also to many other congregations in the region. A revival, still more powerful, occurred in 1774. While he was rejoicing in thus witnessing the fruit of his labours, he was attacked with a most serious illness, which threatened his speedy dissolution. He gathered his family around him in the evening, and gave them his parting counsels and blessings, in the full expectation that he should not see the light of another morning. It happened that, on the afternoon of the same day, several of the neighbouring ministers had met in his parish to hold a "public lecture," as it was called, with special reference to the interesting state of religion among his people; and, instead of having a sermon on the occasion, as usual, they spent the time in earnest prayer that the life of their apparently dying brother might still be preserved. The next morning, to his own surprise, and the great delight of his family, his disease had evidently formed a favourable crisis; and from that time he continued to mend, till he was able to resume his accustomed labours. In 1790, he witnessed yet another similar season of revival, in the midst of which he passed from his labours to his reward.

In 1780, Mr. Green was concerned in a movement which, at the time, excited considerable attention,—the formation of the Morris County Presbytery. He was not in principle strictly a Presbyterian, nor yet strictly a Congregationalist; but he sympathized with some of the peculiarities of each;—that is, he was in favour of Presbyterian Ordination, and of Independent Church Government. Accordingly, he united with several of his

brethren in forming a Presbytery upon this basis ; but it seems, in its practical results, never to have fulfilled his expectations.

Of his religious opinions, he gives the following account:—

“From my youth, I had heard much said upon the principles that are called Calvinistic and Arminian; and when I thought at all, I approved moderate Calvinism, before I had any religion; and when I got my religion in the *New Light* time, I became a more zealous Calvinist. I had a great aversion to the opposers of the New Light religion, and those opposers in New England, where I then lived, were generally supposed to be Arminian, or tinged with Arminian principles. When I settled in the ministry, I was led into Mr. Stoddard’s notions of the Sacraments, by Messrs. Dickinson, Burr, and some others, that I had a high opinion of. They were in other respects strong Calvinists, and zealous promoters of the Reformation, or New Light religion, and opposite to those I had been troubled with as opposers in New England. Hence I was influenced to think they were right in their notions of the Sacraments. My prepossession in their favour, together with some plausible arguments they used, induced me to embrace Stoddard’s sentiments, which before I had thought were not right, and for some time, I practised on his scheme in the admission of church members. But my church was not generally in that opinion, and I was not zealous to urge Mr. Stoddard’s principles.

“After I had been settled a few years, I was inclined to some notions that were Arminian, or that bordered upon Arminianism, especially as to the power of the creature, the freedom of the will, the origin of action, &c. I seemed also to have some notion that there might be a degree of acceptableness to God in the religious duties of the unregenerate; which well agreed with the Stoddardian notion of unregenerate persons covenanting and coming to the Sacrament. But I continued not long in these notions; for, when I came to weigh and consider things well, I found I held several inconsistent sentiments. My sentiments in general were Calvinistic—I was founded and established in the principles; and yet I found that I had, in a measure, given in to several things that were Arminian, and quite inconsistent with my Calvinistic principles. I had been inclined to such notions of human freedom, the sufficiency of the creature, origin of power, duties of the unregenerate, their covenanting and using Sacraments, as were not consistent with other sentiments which I firmly believed, which I had the fullest evidence of, and could clearly demonstrate. When I came to look thoroughly into things, I found that all the Arminian notions or doctrines were so connected, that they must and would stand or fall together—the same connection I also found to be in Calvinistic sentiments. Dr. Watts’ Terms of Christian Communion, Edwards’ Inquiry concerning qualifications for Sacraments, and his book on the Will, were assistances to me in studying these points; and were a considerable means to help to bring me off from all the notions that bordered on Arminianism.”

Mr. Green was a most vigorous and uncompromising opposer of African Slavery. He opposed it in public and in private, from the pulpit and the press, with the utmost zeal, though he stood almost alone in doing so. It was even made a term of Christian fellowship in the church of which he was pastor, that no Christian brother or sister should hold a human being in bondage.

He was an earnest advocate for American Independence. He even published a pamphlet to show its reasonableness and necessity, at a period when such an opinion was very extensively branded as a political heresy. He was elected, though contrary to his strongly expressed wishes, a member of the Provincial Congress of New Jersey, which set aside the Royal government of that Province, and formed the present constitution of the State; and he was Chairman of the committee which drafted the constitution. He published a series of able articles in a newspaper, designed to put his fellow citizens on their guard against the disastrous results of the paper currency, with which the country was then inundated. These essays were republished in many of the newspapers of the day; and the plan which they prescribed for the redemption of the “Continental currency,” was very nearly the same which Congress ultimately adopted. When the British troops overran the State of New Jersey, in the autumn of 1776 and the beginning of 1777, it was thought that his prominence as a Whig peculiarly exposed him

to hostile incursions and depredations; but he remained at his post nearly the whole time, and suffered no injury, and no material inconvenience.

Mr. Green published three Sermons, the subjects of which were,—“The nature of natural and moral inability;” “The sins of youth visited with punishment in subsequent life;” and “The nature of an acceptable Fast”—the latter was preached on a Fast day appointed by Congress. He published also the following miscellaneous pamphlets:—An Inquiry into the constitution and discipline of the Jewish Church, in order to cast some light on the controversy concerning qualifications for the Sacraments of the New Testament. With an Appendix, 1768. A Reply to the Rev. George Beckwith’s Answer to Mr. Green’s Sermon, entitled Christian Baptism, in a Letter to a friend, 1769; A small help offered to heads of families on the religious instructions of their households; A vision of Hell, consisting chiefly of a Dialogue between the devils on the temptations which they had found most successful in ruining immortal souls. This pamphlet was anonymous, and passed through several editions. A Reply to the Rev. George Beckwith’s Answer to Mr. Green’s Sermon entitled “Christian Baptism,” in a Letter to a friend, 1769.

Mr. Green’s last illness was short. In May, 1790, he had an attack of influenza, which, however, was not considered serious, until a short time before its fatal termination. Then he became suddenly comatose, and though he continued to answer questions intelligently, he manifested little disposition to converse. Being apprized that his end had nearly come, he was asked by his wife what were his views as to his future well-being, and he replied,—“I have a hope,”—and after a short interval, added,—“and some fear.” Having uttered these words, his spirit gently passed away.

His son, the Rev. Dr. Green, wrote the following epitaph, containing an epitome of his character, which is inscribed on his tomb-stone:—

“Under this stone are deposited the remains of the Rev. Jacob Green, A. M. First Pastor of the Hanover Church, who died, 24th of May, 1790, aged sixty-eight years, of which forty-four were spent in the Gospel ministry. He was a man of temper, even, firm and resolute; of affections, temperate, steady and benevolent; of genius, solid, inquisitive and penetrating; of industry, active and unwearied; of learning, various and accurate; of manners, simple and reserved; of piety, humble, enlightened, fervent and eminent. As a preacher, he was instructive, plain, searching, practical; as a pastor, watchful, laborious; ever intent on some plan for the glory of God and the salvation of his flock; and, by the Divine blessing, happily and eminently successful.”

Mr. Green left in manuscript, an autobiography reaching down as far as 1777. His son, the Rev. Dr. Green, published this in a series of numbers in the tenth volume of his “Christian Advocate;” and supplied the remaining part of the history from his own recollections.