

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.

BY WILLIAM B. SPRAGUE, D. D.

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the way to Harrisburg, Pa. I have been informed that he kept his eye constantly upon his little Bible, scarcely looking his audience in the face at all. An old lady who heard him that day, on being asked, after the sermon, what she thought of Mr. Donnelly, replied,—“He did pretty weel; but he read ower muckle.” He got the better of this extreme diffidence afterwards, and greatly improved every way in his pulpit exhibitions.

Mr. Donnelly was, in other respects, a good Minister of Jesus Christ. He was particularly attentive to the interests of his flock, visiting from house to house, and thus making himself acquainted with their spiritual condition, and adapting his instructions and counsels to their various circumstances. In the Session of the Church, (of which my father was a member,) he was most considerate, and never disposed to lord it over his brethren. He was an excellent Presbyter, was familiar with the details of ecclesiastical business, and was once, if not more than once, Moderator of the Synod. He was undoubtedly to be regarded as one of the lights of his denomination.

Your brother in Christ,

G. McMILLAN

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## JOHN BLACK, D.D.

1799—1849.

FROM THE REV. JOHN N. McLEOD, D.D.

NEW YORK, August 20, 1861.

My dear Sir: I cheerfully comply with your request for some account of the life and character of my venerable friend, the Rev. Dr. Black. My relations with him were such that I am at no loss for material from which to form the desired sketch.

JOHN BLACK, a son of John and Margaret (McKibbin) Black, was born in the North of Ireland, County of Antrim, October 2, 1768, and he made his home there until after he arrived at manhood. The son of respectable parents, he received from them the rudiments of an excellent education, which he completed at Glasgow College, in Scotland. Having graduated at that seat of learning, he returned to his own country, but it was only to leave it for the home of his adoption. In the year 1797 he embarked for America, an exile for liberty. I have known many individuals, in almost every condition in life, from the simple farmer or artisan to the eminent physician, the eloquent lawyer, and the dignified minister of religion, who had more or less concern in the Irish Insurrection of 1797—98; and I have never known a mean man among them all. Coming to the United States, instinct with the love of liberty, and ardently admiring our republican institutions, they formed a fine and highly useful element in our growing population, and contributed their part to the formation of our national character. Of these was Dr. Black, who was all his life an intelligent republican, and at home in every thing that related to the science of government, the rights of man, and the constitution and laws of his country. It has often been said of him, by good judges, that, had he been of the legal profession, he would have made an acute Lawyer, a discriminating Judge, or a profound and influential Statesman. As it was, he enjoyed the society of some of the ablest jurists and civilians of his own and other States, and upon subjects of practical morality, such as Slavery, Punishment, Citizenship, War, Privateering and Lotteries, his pen was often and

effectively employed in the periodicals of the day. Having come to the United States in the fall of 1797, he was employed for some time as a teacher of the Classics in the neighbourhood of Philadelphia, and latterly in connection with the University there. Having been licensed to preach the Gospel by the Presbytery of the Reformed Presbyterian Church, in 1799, he immediately devoted himself to this work, soon passed to the Western country, and settled in Pittsburg, then a village of a few scattering houses. On the same day, and from the same authority, the late Rev. Drs. Alexander McLeod and Samuel B. Wylie received their license as preachers, and the three constituted a triumvirate of honourable and honoured Ministers of Christ, whose personal friendship continued while life lasted, and whose eminent abilities and usefulness secured to them a large measure of the public confidence. Dr. Black remained for forty-eight years, and until he closed his life, on the 25th of October, 1849, in the same pastoral charge in Pittsburg. He was identified with almost all the literary and benevolent institutions of that city and vicinity, having assisted in laying their foundations; and he deserves to be recognized by posterity as one of the early moral pioneers of that important section of our country.

Dr. Black was rather below the middle stature; but his intellectual head, his penetrating and lively eye, his rapid and even restless movement, and, withal, the decision that showed itself in all his conduct, marked him out at once as a superior man, who had a purpose, who could carry it out with fearless energy, and who was formed to exercise great influence over others. He was an eminently social man. No one could be more serious than he when seriousness was required, and yet he was courteous, and even witty and playful, when time and place allowed the indulgence of these qualities. All kinds of persons sought and enjoyed his companionship, and his place in the various institutions with which he was connected was always the working department.

Considered in his public and social relations, Dr. Black may be truly said to have been all his life a teacher of others. Beginning with the primary school, he marched upwards to the Tutorship, Professorate, and Presidency of the College. Classes of Theological students of his own and other denominations waited upon his instructions, gratuitously tendered, and when themes of peculiar difficulty were to be handled, he was the man to whom his brethren in the ministry would apply among the first to state and elucidate them before the public assembly. Well-read in physical science, in medicine, and in general literature, and a proficient in the Hebrew tongue, he was also thoroughly versed in the Greek and Latin languages. With the latter he was specially familiar. He spoke it well, and could, with ease and elegance, transfer the English into it, and *vice versa*. I have known him prepare, at a sitting, a form of diploma for a College, and at another a preface for a book in that language. The Latin introduction to Rabbi Leeser's issue of the Hebrew Bible, last printed, Philadelphia edition, is from his pen. In his teachings Dr. Black showed great power of analysis. He aimed at making his pupils understand fundamentals, and, accurate himself in every thing, he sought to give a taste for accuracy to others. It is rare that a philosophical acquaintance with the genius of the language taught, and a minute knowledge of its grammatical mechanism, are found together in the same man, as was the case with Dr. Black. He never heard a grammatical blunder committed that he did not, if possible, correct; and his dear friends, Drs. Wylie and McLeod, were accustomed familiarly to call him "*grapho*," the

Greek word from which grammar is derived, as expressive of his attainments in this kind of knowledge. Dr. Black, too, took delight in communicating knowledge to others. I have known him spend an hour in teaching the letters or the stops to a little child in the house of a friend where he was as a visitor; and again and again sitting up all night to elucidate an abstruse subject in Theology to an enquiring Divinity student. No wonder that his pupils loved him, and that there are so many, East and West, who cherish his memory with profound affection.

Dr. Black held the Chair of Latin and Greek in the Western University at Pittsburg, from its establishment until his resignation, on making a visit to Europe in 1832; and, on the death of his early friend, the Rev. Dr. Bruce, he was chosen to succeed him as President of Duquesne College, Pittsburg: of this, he accepted, only to graduate the then existing Senior Class, and then retired altogether from the field.

As a Controvertist, with both tongue and pen, Dr. Black was for years distinguished. He attacked the errors and vices of the day with entire fearlessness, and was never at a loss for weapons of offensive or defensive warfare. Few men wished to encounter him a second time in argument, and he had great tact in discovering the character of his opponent and his audience. It is narrated of him that he thus disposed of a noisy, obtrusive individual, who called himself a —— Preacher. They were travelling together in a steambot on the Ohio River. The Preacher had gathered a crowd around him, and had confounded one or two plain men who had attempted some reply to his declamation. He proposed to prove his doctrine from Scripture, quoted large portions of it, and, in closing, challenged all present to reply if they could, to his arguments. At this moment Dr. Black, who had been looking on from the edge of the crowd, stepped forward and said that he had a word to say. He then, with great gravity, began and repeated nearly the whole of the first chapter of I. Chronicles, composed almost entirely of hard names. The wonder of the people was excited; and, as the Doctor ceased abruptly, his opponent asked, with excitement,—“What has all this to do with the subject?” “N thing at all,” said the Doctor, “but you quoted Scripture, and so have I, and mine is just as much to the purpose as yours.” The ridicule told effectively, the company dispersed with a shout of laughter, and the Doctor, who judged that this was the only proper mode of disposing of the matter, retired to his state-room.

On the floor of a Church Judicatory few men were superior to Dr. Black. He had studied minutely the principles and usages of Presbyterial regimen. He understood the order of judicial proceeding. His recollections of precedents was remarkably accurate, and therefore cases of discipline were disentangled from their difficulties, and reduced to their equitable principles, with great facility, by his judicious remarks and management. He demanded punctiliously the observance of the due order, and viewed the proper forms of judicial proceeding as the safeguards of personal, conscientious liberty. When the judicatory of which he was a member would become confused and at a stand, as such Bodies often do, he was the man who could show them the way of consistent evasion. “The Directory for Worship,” in the Reformed Presbyterian Church, is from the pen of Dr. Black, and he served for many years as the Stated Clerk of her Supreme Judicatory.

But the exercise of the Christian Ministry was Dr. Black’s chosen employment. This engaged all his versatile talents, and to this all his other engagements were

subordinated. When he took charge of some dozen families of Reformed Presbyterians in Pittsburg and its vicinity, they composed the only congregation of that Christian denomination, West of the Allegheny Mountains. He lived to see three Presbyteries of that Church in what had been his personal field of missionary labour. Over this field he often rode thousands of miles each year. He every where preached the Word, and was universally acceptable to the people, who gathered, in large numbers, to hear him.

Dr. Black's preaching talents were of a high order. He was a distinct, plain, fluent speaker, always interesting and often eloquent and powerful. Full of knowledge of his subject, argumentative, learned, original, self-possessed, he was equally at home whether discussing a doctrine, urging a duty, solving cases of conscience, or elucidating the experiences and dispensing the consolations of the Christian life. Having a lively imagination, he dealt largely in allegory, and would sometimes enrapture his audience with his descriptions of Scripture scenery, and figurative exhibitions of the evils or graces of their own hearts. As he advanced in life, his spirituality and directness increased, and aged Christians were specially delighted with his ministrations. One of his most marked characteristics as a Preacher was his extreme readiness. It was commonly said by his brethren that Dr. Black never refused an invitation to preach, and this was almost literally true. By day or by night, in the house or by the way, to a handful or a crowd, and often in circumstances that would have deterred most men from a public appearance, he was ready to stand forth and proclaim the Gospel of his Saviour. Often has he released from a trying service a younger brother, who had not had time to make his needful preparation, and when others failed in discharging their public appointments, he was ready to become their substitute. At a certain time he was engaged to preach in the country, at a distance from his own house. He had selected from a number of scraps of paper, one on which was the subject that he designed to speak upon. Having set out on horseback with a brother, the time was engrossed in conversation, until they came within sight of the place, where the people were already assembling. On looking for his Bible and memorandum, it was found that both were forgotten, and the subject had slipped from his memory. "What shall I do?" said the Doctor to his brother, with some emotion,— "I have forgotten not only my sermon, but even my text." "It is likely there will be a Bible there," said the brother laconically,— "there are texts enough in it, and I expect you will be able to find one, and a sermon too." And so it was. He preached with great freedom upon a different subject from the one intended, as was afterwards ascertained. After sermon, an intelligent female came to him with joy, told him she had been greatly troubled on the very subject of which he had been treating, and thanked God for sending him there to quiet her disturbed heart. On another occasion, when, on a visit to Belfast, in Ireland, in 1832, being in the house of the late Rev. John Alexander, D.D., of the Reformed Presbyterian Church there, he was informed by his host that he had an appointment to preach and baptize at a short distance from town, and was asked to accompany him. Other ministers were present, and, as they came within sight of the place of meeting, Dr. Alexander inquires,— "Who is to preach?" "Yourself," says Dr. Black. "No," replies Dr. Alexander, "the people must hear the stranger." Though at first displeased at being so much taken by surprise, Dr. Black yielded to the impor-

tunity of his friends, who knew their man, and, although not expecting to preach, he discoursed most ingeniously and satisfactorily, for nearly an hour, on the subject of Infant Baptism, until all were delighted or surprised. But I will give one other example. Dr. Black had been appointed by his church to represent them in the Union Convention of Reformed Churches. Its annual meetings were opened by a Sermon appointed the previous year. At one of these meetings the person appointed did not appear. The hour had arrived, and a large congregation, including many ministers of the Gospel, were present, but no Preacher presented himself. Dr. Black was appealed to and urged to preach. He said,—“No, I am at home,—some of the strangers must do it;” and thus he declined. He, however, added, as the person who applied to him was passing away, “If no one else can be found to do it, you may come back to me.” All excused themselves—it did come back to the Doctor. With great solemnity he took the pulpit, and preached a most admirable sermon, and what was especially striking to all, was its remarkable appropriateness to the time, place and circumstances; and the whole produced a great impression.

Dr. Black was, indeed, a man for all occasions. And this characteristic and uncommon readiness was the result, not of recklessness nor love of ostentation, nor reliance on good memory,—for he never wrote out or memorized his discourses,—but it came from his possessing very many of the higher order of mental and gracious qualifications. He was ready, because he had a full mental storehouse,—the power of abstraction, the gift of language, a great command of the resources of his own mind, and, above all, a strong, humble and unwavering dependence on the help of God’s Holy Spirit. He preached because he loved the work, and had found, by repeated trial, that he had from God the ready power to perform it. And, yet, Dr. Black *prepared* to preach. He was always preparing. His studies were never finished, and, to the close of his life, he was a laborious student. His views of the Christian ministry were too high to admit of the attempt to serve God with what had cost him nothing. He selected his subject, elaborated it in his mind, used all available helps, wrote upon paper an extended skeleton, and so went to the desk to speak on God’s behalf to sinners. He preached for nearly fifty years, and then died with the harness on.

Dr. Black’s life was too active, and too much engrossed with multifarious cares, to effect much as an author. And yet few men are more frequently called to print their spoken discourses. He wrote largely for the newspapers and periodicals of the day, and he left behind him, as more permanent monuments of his industry and learning, an extended Discourse on “Church Fellowship;” “The Bible Against Slavery;” “Two Discourses on the Baptist Controversy;” and one on “The Duration of the Mediatorial Kingdom.” This last is a remarkable production. It was preached at the request of several ministers of various denominations in Pittsburg and the vicinity, and, although written when the author was entering his eightieth year, shows all the freshness and activity of earlier days. “Is Dr. Black wearing out?” a mutual friend inquired of Dr. Gilbert McMaster, his old associate. “Dr. Black will never *wear out*,” replied Dr. McMaster; “when the time comes, he will *go out*.” And so it proved. The lamp of life was suddenly blown out by the storm of disease, sent immediately from God. It was not left to wear down and expire, after long flickering in its socket. And Dr. McMaster has gone out too. But stars set to rise again—they do not perish.

Dr. Black was married to Elizabeth Watson, daughter of Andrew and Margaret (Thomson) Watson, of Pittsburg. They had ten children, eight of whom survived both parents. Three of the sons became Clergymen, and one a Lawyer, and one a Physician. *John* died on the 15th of August, 1828, in the twenty-third year of his age, soon after becoming a licentiate of the Reformed Presbyterian Church. *Andrew Watson* was graduated at the Western University (Pittsburg) in 1826; was licensed to preach, by the Reformed Presbytery of Pittsburg, in the winter of 1828; and, after travelling extensively in the West and South, was Ordained, and installed Pastor of the Congregations of Shenango and Neshannock, Pa., on the 18th of January, 1832. He was married on the 1st of January, 1835, to Margaret, youngest daughter of John Roseburgh, of Pittsburg. In 1839 he accepted a call to the then newly organized Reformed Presbyterian Church in Allegheny City, Pa. While Pastor of this church, he received the appointment of Chaplain, or Moral Instructor, in the Penitentiary of the Western District of Pennsylvania, and for several years discharged its duties with success. In 1852 he was honoured with the degree of Doctor of Divinity from Rutgers College. In 1855 he resigned his charge in Allegheny, and accepted, for a year, the agency of the American Bible Society, for several of the Northern Counties of Pennsylvania and Ohio; and, in the mean time, received invitations to settle in Chicago and several other places, all of which he declined. At a meeting of the General Synod of the Reformed Presbyterian Church, held in Cedarville, O., in June, 1857, he received the appointment of delegate to the sister churches of Britain and Ireland, and also of the representative of the Church to which he belonged, to the Conference of Evangelical Christians meeting in Berlin, Prussia. These appointments he fulfilled with great fidelity and acceptance. At the meeting of the General Synod of the Reformed Presbyterian Church, held in Eden, Ill., in June, 1858, he was appointed Professor of Exegetical, Historical and Evangelistic Theology in the Theological Seminary under their care. He was preparing for the duties thus devolved upon him by a unanimous act of the highest judicatory of his Church, when he was called to his reward. He died on the 10th of September, 1858, just entering his fifty-first year. He was an able, learned and judicious man, and an earnest, eloquent and popular preacher.

*Samuel Wylie* was graduated at the Western University in 1835, became eminent in the profession of Law, was a Judge, and Governor of Nebraska Territory. He was also a Colonel of Volunteers in the Mexican War. When the Southern Rebellion broke out he accepted the command of a Regiment of Volunteers from his native city, and proceeded at once to the field. He was killed by a rifle ball, when gallantly leading his regiment in a charge against the enemy, before Richmond, on the 27th of June, 1862, in the forty-sixth year of his age. He was highly gifted, learned, eloquent, courageous, and intensely patriotic.

*Robert John*, the fifth son, was graduated at the Western University in 1840 or 1841; studied Theology partly under the direction of his father, and partly in the Seminary of the Reformed Presbyterian Church, under the direction of the Rev. Dr. S. B. Wylie. He was licensed, by the Reformed Presbytery of Pittsburg, in October, 1843, and, having preached with acceptance in various parts of the Church until January, 1847, he received a call, at that time, to become the Pastor of the Third Reformed Presbyterian Church in Philadelphia. Having accepted this call, he was ordained and installed on the 22d of April following.

In August, 1853, he was united in marriage with Susan Julia Maria, daughter of the late Dr. S. B. Wylie, and they became the parents of three children. Mr. Black continued to labour with great diligence and fidelity till he was disabled by the malady which terminated in his death. He died on the 10th of October, 1860, in the forty-fifth year of his age, and the fourteenth of his ministry. He was an able, eloquent and highly popular Preacher, and his early demise was deeply lamented. One of Dr. Black's daughters is married to a clergyman, the Rev. Samuel Wylie, of Eden, Ill.

Very respectfully yours,

J. N. McLEOD.

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### SAMUEL BROWN WYLIE, D.D.\*

1799—1852.

SAMUEL BROWN WYLIE, a son of Adam and Margaret Wylie, was born in Moylagh, near Ballymena, County of Antrim, Ireland, May 21, 1773. His father was a farmer in easy circumstances, and both his parents were exemplary members of the Reformed Presbyterian Church. His religious education was very carefully attended to in the family, and the influence of an elder sister had much to do in moulding his Christian character and determining his choice of the ministry for a profession. After having gone through the requisite course of preparation,—during which time he was himself engaged as a teacher,—he entered Glasgow College, where he distinguished himself much as a scholar, and graduated as Master of Arts in April, 1797. After his graduation he engaged in teaching a school in Ballymena, and continued thus employed until he was compelled to fly from his native land in consequence of his connection with the efforts made in favour of Irish independence.

Mr. Wylie landed at Newcastle, Del., on the 18th of October, 1797, after a passage of twenty days. Notwithstanding the Yellow Fever was then prevailing in Philadelphia, he, with one of his fellow-emigrants, after a few days, started for the city on foot, and arrived there on the 31st. Within about six weeks, through the kindness of a venerable man of the Society of Friends, he was engaged in teaching a school in Cheltenham, about ten miles North of the city. Here he remained until the fall of 1798, when he was appointed a Tutor in the University of Pennsylvania. He afterwards established a private academy, which he taught with great success for many years. In 1828 he became Professor of the Latin and Greek Languages in the University of Pennsylvania, and held the place until 1845, when he ceased from its active duties, and became Professor *emeritus*. On the organization of the Theological Seminary of the Reformed Presbyterian Church, in 1808, he was appointed a Professor in that institution, and held the office until his resignation of it in 1851. He was engaged as a teacher, with only some slight interruptions, during a period of upwards of sixty years.

He studied Theology, after he came to this country, under the care of the Reformed Presbytery, and was licensed to preach, by that Body, at Coldenham,

\* MS. from his son, Rev. Dr. Wylie, of Philadelphia.—Dr. McLeod's Fun. Disc.