

CENTENNIAL BIOGRAPHY.

MEN OF MARK

OF

CUMBERLAND VALLEY, PA.

1776—1876.

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

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REV. DAVID DENNY.



THE REV. DAVID DENNY was the third son of a Revolutionary soldier who fell in battle, when his eldest son, contending at his side, was captured by the enemy. He graduated at Dickinson College, while Dr. Charles Nisbit was Principal of that institution, and under that learned and classic divine began and completed his theological studies. He was a fond admirer of his distinguished preceptor, and often narrated anecdotes illustrative of his wit, learning and accomplishments. The sources of Philosophy and Divinity at that day were neither as copious nor accessible as at present, and the acquisitions of the students were consequently earned by severer toil and application than the facilities of learning now exact. The lectures of Dr. Nisbit were delivered at a modulated rate and tone, that the members of his class might be able to reduce them to writing as they fell from his lips. Mr. Denny, at his decease, left in his library seven quarto volumes of these discourses, in his own handsome and legible handwriting, which form together a respectable body of metaphysics and divinity. Whatever the present intrinsic value of these lectures may be, when the bounds of sacred and profane learning have been so much enlarged, the diligent reader will find in many pages of them strong marks of the erudition, original thought and classic taste of the author.

Mr. Denny was licensed to preach the Gospel about the year 1792, by the Presbytery of Carlisle, within whose bounds he remained until the close of his pastoral office. He was first installed over two congregations in Path Valley, that had lately become vacated by the death of the Rev. Mr. Dougal, where he continued until the year 1800, in the enjoyment of the esteem and affection of a much beloved people. In the year last mentioned, he was transferred to the pastoral charge of the Falling Spring Church, in Chambersburg, which he retained until the termination of his public ministrations—a period of thirty-eight years. His means derived from the ministry being inadequate to the demands of a large and growing family, he was obliged to combine with it, for a series of years, the labours of a teacher of the learned languages in an academy, and being master of economy he secured that enviable maintenance midway between poverty and wealth, so

desirable to the good man, and that proves at once a defence against the inconveniences of penury, and the vices of profusion.

In the year of Mr. Denny's retirement from the active duties of the sanctuary, death snatched from his side the fond partner of his pilgrimage, a lady of exalted worth, and by the same stroke broke his cheerful spirit and firm constitution. Companions also who shared his better years and pastoral intimacy, had then dropped away one by one around him, until he was left almost alone, like the gray oak of the forest, surrounded by generations of a younger growth. He continued to languish under increasing infirmity, until repeated attacks of paralysis accelerated his decline and deprived him of the power of articulate speech. It was not until several months after this trying visitation, (December 16th, 1845,) that the mysterious hand which often chastens out of plenitude of love, called him, by a voice gentle and meek as the breathing of infant slumber, from the sorrow of his earthly state to the joyous assembly of the just. His person, cast in the finest mould for strength, activity and proportion, was well adapted to the air of dignity which nature herself had impressed upon it. His mind was of a strong and discerning order, always governed by candour and sincerity, and warmed by the love of truth. His views were expressed in the language of simplicity and earnestness, neither adorned nor obscured by the garnish of imagery or the flashes of rhetoric.

In doctrine Mr. Denny was a decided Calvinist, and conscientiously attached to the standards of the Presbyterian Church. Modesty and humility were interwoven with the very texture of his heart, and its liveliest sympathies were always in expansion for the sick, the suffering and the desolate. Neither inclemency of weather nor transient illness were suffered to detain him from the exercises of the pulpit, and he enjoyed, in no ordinary degree, the esteem and affection of the people among whom he laboured. He was actuated in social intercourse by a manly, tolerant and liberal spirit, and has left to all who stood in private or public relations to him, an example of many virtues with which humanity is not often adorned, which they may fail to imitate, but can never cease to admire and love.