

HISTORY
OF
LANCASTER COUNTY
PENNSYLVANIA,
WITH
BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCHES
OF MANY OF ITS
PIONEERS AND PROMINENT MEN.

BY
FRANKLIN ELLIS
AND
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ILLUSTRATED.

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JOHN WILLIAMSON NEVIN, D.D., LL.D., was born in Franklin County, Pa., Feb. 20, 1803. He is descended from Scotch-Irish ancestry, and one conspicuous in statemanship and literature. His paternal grandmother was a sister of the distinguished Hugh Williamson, LL.D., one of the framers of the United States Constitution, and a man noted in the republic of letters, from whom he derives his middle name. By birth and blood a Presbyterian, the venerable doctor, when a boy, was brought up carefully in the Christian faith by pious parents under the strict Old-School Presbyterian *régime* which at that time pervaded the whole community, and was especially prominent in the old Middlespring Church, which the family attended. His father, though a farmer, was a graduate of Dickinson College, and at an early day placed the Latin grammar in the hands of his son, which in due time he followed with the Greek, and gave him a drill so thorough, if not even severe, that more than one Franklin and Marshall boy felt the effects of it full fifty years afterwards.

In the fall of 1817 he was matriculated as a student in Union College, New York, then under the able presidency of Dr. Eliphalet Nott, and although the youngest in his class, was graduated with honor in 1821. On his way to college he met in New York City his patriarchal kinsman, Dr. Hugh Williamson, to whose advice may be partly due his correct habits.

and life-long opposition to the use of tobacco and spirituous liquors. During his college life he professed a change of heart through the preaching of Mr. Nettleton, a revivalist, and united with the church. Bodily prostration for two years followed his classic career, which time he mostly spent in the fields and woods on the homestead, and acquired for a time a taste for botanical pursuits. Upon the return of his health he resumed the studies of Cicero, Homer, and the sweet-flowing language of Fenelon and Bossuet, for which he had an especial taste, with greater zeal than ever. Martial ardor also coming in for a share of youthful recognition, he united himself to a military company, and was chosen orderly sergeant.

In the fall of 1823 he entered the theological seminary at Princeton, and in the regular theological course took a special interest in Oriental and Biblical literature, reading the whole Bible in Hebrew, and thereby securing the flattering distinction of being universally admitted the best Hebrew scholar in the institution. This distinction may be regarded as forming the turning-point in his life, and contributed to mould his whole subsequent career. In 1826 he was invited to temporarily supply the chair of Oriental and Biblical literature, made vacant by Dr. Hodge, who was sent to Europe on a two-years' tour for his health, during which time he wrote his "Biblical Antiquities," a hand-book which has obtained an extensive circulation both in America and Europe. In October, 1828, he was licensed by the Presbytery of Carlisle, held at Philadelphia, to preach the gospel, and about the same time invited to the chair of Biblical Literature in the new theological seminary then being established by the General Assembly at Allegheny, Pa. In December, 1829, then in the twenty-seventh year of his age, he assumed his duties in connection with this institution, then laboring under the disadvantages of no buildings, no library, no endowment, no prestige from the past, and all uncertainty for the future, the East naturally clinging to Princeton, while the West was largely disaffected, leaving the young institution to draw its patronage largely from Western Pennsylvania. Here Dr. Nevin labored for ten years, preached as supply at many places, and regularly at "Braddock's Field," besides being busy with his pen—which never grew rusty—as a correspondent of the Presbyterian *Christian Herald*, and editor of *The Friend*, in the interest of the "Young Men's Society of Pittsburgh and vicinity."

The Western Theological Seminary, now a power in the Presbyterian Church, owes much of its prosperity to the assiduity and ability of the subject of this notice. About the same time of his election to the chair in this seminary, he received a pressing invitation to return to Princeton and become a writer of books for the Sunday-School Union, and in his sermons, lectures, and with his pen, while at Pittsburgh, he was the unreserved opponent of slavery,

infidelity, fashionable amusements, ladies' fairs, and theatrical entertainments. In May, 1840, through the earnest solicitation of a committee appointed by the Synod of the Reformed Church in the United States, he accepted and was inducted into the professorship of theology in the Theological Seminary of that church, then located at Mercersburg, Pa. This change of position was not considered to be of itself any change of denominational faith, only a transition from one section of the general Reformed confession to another, and took place accordingly with the full approbation and favor of the friends of Dr. Nevin in the Presbyterian Church, and under the advice of Dr. Archibald Alexander, his former theological instructor at Princeton. During his connection with the Western Seminary he began the study of German, in order to reach the contents of the theological and philosophical works of the deep thinkers of Germany, the land of profound erudition and ripe scholastic attainment. This new position widened his view of the proper constitution and history of the Reformed Church, enlarged the range of his German studies, and brought him into a new and closer communication with the theological life of the Lutheran Confession, and in this way made room in his mind more and more for a sense of the catholic, the historical, the objective in Christianity, which may be taken as the key to the whole course of his thinking and working in the church afterwards down to the present time.

At Mercersburg Dr. Nevin was associated with the well-known German scholar, Frederick Augustus Rauch, then president of Marshall College, in the same place. The death of Dr. Rauch, March 2, 1841, made it necessary for Dr. Nevin to assume the temporary presidency of the college, which was afterwards made permanent, and which position he filled for ten years, without any salary. In 1843 he became involved in what has been known as the "anxious bench controversy," through the publication of his tract called "The Anxious Bench," directed against the use of certain means and methods employed extensively at the time among different denominations in the service of religious revivals, which has been regarded as the beginning of the movement since spoken of as the Mercersburg Theology.

In 1844 he received as his colleague in the seminary, Dr. Philip Schaff, of Germany, since famous throughout the world for his theological learning and as an honored professor in the Presbyterian Theological Seminary of New York. His inaugural address at Reading, in that year, in the German language, a truly able discussion of the distinctive, original, and fundamental meaning of the great reformation of the sixteenth century, Dr. Nevin translated and published in 1845, under the title of "The True Principle of Protestantism as related to the Present State of the Church," together with an introduction from his own pen, and by Dr. Schaff's particular desire, with the

appendage also of a sermon on "Catholic Unity," preached by Dr. Nevin the previous year before a convention of the Dutch and German Reformed Churches in Harrisburg, the whole forming a volume of over two hundred pages.

In 1846 Dr. Nevin published "The Mystical Presence, a Vindication of the Reformed or Calvinistic Doctrine of the Holy Eucharist;" the same year "The Church," a sermon preached at the opening of the German Reformed Synod at Carlisle, came from his pen; in 1847, "The History and Genius of the Heidelberg Catechism;" and in 1848, a tract entitled "Antichrist, or the Spirit of Sect and Schism." From January, 1849, to January, 1853, he edited the *Mercersburg Review*, published by the Alumni Association of Marshall College, being its chief contributor, and he has written largely since for the same periodical, as well as for the *Reformed Church Messenger*. He resigned his professorship in the seminary in 1851, and the presidency of Marshall College in 1853, upon its removal to Lancaster and consolidation with Franklin College of this city. Although proffered the presidency of the new institution, he withdrew to private life, being nearly worn out in body and mind, but delivered, by special request, a baccalaureate address to the first graduating class of the new college on Aug. 31, 1853, which was published as a tract under the title of "Man's True Destiny." For one year after his resignation, Dr. Nevin resided at Carlisle, for one year in Lancaster City, from 1856 to 1858 at Windsor Forges, near Churchtown, the old mansion property of his wife's father, and since that time at "Caernarvon Place," in the immediate neighborhood of Lancaster City. Through these years he still continued to preach frequently and also to perform occasional work with his pen. He had much to do in particular with the long and difficult task of bringing to completion the new "liturgy" which engaged for so many years the best energies of the Eastern Synod of the German Reformed Church.

In the fall of 1861 he yielded to the desire of the faculty, and undertook partial service as professor in particular of History and Æsthetics, and in 1866 became once more president of the institution,—Franklin and Marshall College,—which position he resigned in 1876, and retired from all work of public instruction. Among his more important publications are the following: 1. "The Doctrine of the Reformed Church on the Presence of Christ in the Lord's Supper," an extended answer to Dr. Hodge's review of "The Mystical Presence," in 1848; 2. "The Apostles' Creed: its Origin, Constitution, and Plan," 1849; 3. "Early Christianity," 1851; 4. "Cyprian," 1852; 5. "The Dutch Crusade," 1854; 6. "Review of Dr. Hodge's Commentary on the Ephesians," 1857; 7. "The Liturgical Question," 1862; 8. "Christ and Him Crucified," a *concio ad clerum*, preached at the opening of the first General Synod of the German Reformed Church in Pittsburgh, 1863; 9. "Vindication of the

Revised Liturgy," 1867; 10. "Answer to Professor Doener, of Berlin, Germany," 1868; 11. "Once for All," based on a sermon preached before the Synod at Danville, Pa., 1869; 12. "Revelation and Redemption," opening sermon before the Synod at Mechanicsburg, Pa., 1870; 13. "The Revelation of God in Christ," anniversary discourse before the Theological Seminary at Mercersburg, 1871; 14. "Christ and His Spirit," 1872; 15. "Baccalaureate Discourse, John iii. 13," 1872.

"Dr. Nevin, as a theologian, is one of no ordinary cast. His strong dialectic acumen has led him far beyond the range of mere theology, and has enabled him to unravel the mazes that metaphysical subtlety has drawn around the Christian faith. His own mind is a deeply metaphysical one, and his profound inquiries into this department have led him to scan the whole range of philosophy, and to investigate it on the metaphysical side from Aristotle to Hegel, as well as on the metaphysico-theological side from Plato to Schleiermacher. The argumentations and reasonings of an Origen, an Augustine, an Anselm, and an Aquinas are to him no longer mysteries. The thoughts of these world-renowned thinkers he has made his own. Although an American, he has made himself familiar with ancient forms of thought, and, after grasping the results of the Kantian problems, kept pace with the latest developments of the German mind.

"Like Jonathan Edwards, unfavored with European university culture, who by his own innate strength of intellect could grasp and solve the problems of the philosophers of whom he had never heard, and who ranks as the first metaphysician of his century, the subject of our notice has also probed the depth of the human understanding, and to his comprehensive mind metaphysical difficulties retire, and faith and reason stand harmonized in gospel revelation. To Dr. Nevin will history also accord, if not the highest niche in the temple of the metaphysical fame of the century, at least a very high one."¹

His wife, Martha J., a woman of education and refinement, whom he married Jan. 1, 1835, is the second daughter of Hon. Robert Jenkins (1769–1848), member of Congress in 1809 to 1811, previously a member of the Pennsylvania Legislature, served in the insurrection of "Fries," soon after the Revolutionary war, and the well-known iron-master of Windsor Place, Caernarvon township, being a descendant of David Jenkins, who came from Wales in 1700, whose son John settled there in 1719. Her mother, Catherine Carmichael, a woman of great accomplishments, born in 1774, was married in 1799. Dr. Nevin's father was John (1776–1829) and his mother Martha McCracken (1779–1859), whose father, William (1753–1803), came from Scotland. Their eight children are: Dr. John W., William M., professor of Belles-Lettres in Franklin and Marshall College; Rev. Daniel E. Nevin, a

¹ Alexander Harris' Biographical History of Lancaster County.

Presbyterian clergyman of Sewickley, Pa.; Theodore H. Nevin, Esq., president of the First National Bank of Allegheny; Robert P. Nevin, editor of the *Pittsburgh Times*; Margaret, was the wife of Dr. John K. Finley, of Niles, Mich.; Elizabeth F., wife of Dr. Alexander B. Brown, formerly president of Jefferson College; and Martha Mary, wife of John Irwin, of Sewickley. Dr. Nevin's grandfather, Daniel Nevin (1744-1812), came from Ireland, and married Margaret Williamson, who was a native of England, and a sister of Dr. Hugh Williamson, LL.D., before alluded to, and who wrote a history of North Carolina, and a work on climate. Dr. Nevin's surviving children are W. Wilberforce, formerly editor of the *Philadelphia Press*; Alice; Robert J., rector of the American Chapel at Rome, Italy; Blanche, a sculptor at Florence, Italy; and Martha J., wife of Robert H. Sayer, of Bethlehem, Pa., president of the Southern Pennsylvania Railroad.