

CENTENNIAL BIOGRAPHY.

MEN OF MARK

OF

CUMBERLAND VALLEY, PA.

1776—1876.

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

PHILADELPHIA:
FULTON PUBLISHING COMPANY.
1876.

SAMUEL AGNEW, M. D.

DOCTOR SAMUEL AGNEW was born at Millerstown, near Gettysburg, in Adams county, August 10th, in the year 1777, and was the son of James Agnew and Mary Ramsey.

He was of Scotch descent, or from that people who, encouraged by James I, migrated from Scotland and England to the confiscated estates in the province of Ulster. They were a rare people. Under their industry, intelligence and enterprise the desolated lands were reclaimed, towns grew up, and manufactures were extensively established. They were Presbyterians, and neither the tyranny of Charles II or James II, the dragoons of Claverhouse, nor the intimidations of the Papacy, could compel them to surrender their independence, or dishonour their manhood. These were the people who have made sacred the glens and moors of Scotland and Ireland, and who rather than yield their convictions of faith and duty, suffered the sharpest persecutions, and came to this side of the Atlantic to find a home more congenial to their tastes. Men of strong intellects, independent thinkers, intolerant of oppression, gentle in peace, terrible in war, they have left their impress upon all the institutions of the country of their adoption. The father of Dr. Samuel Agnew was quite as ready to resist oppression as his ancestors had been, and when hostilities commenced in the Colonies, he espoused their cause against the encroachments of Great Britain, took up arms as a soldier and was wounded in one of the battles of New Jersey.

The academical studies of Dr. Agnew were commenced under Rev. Matthew Dobbin, of Gettysburg; and after his graduation at Dickinson College, Carlisle, in 1798, he turned his attention to the study of medicine, under Dr. John McClellan, a prominent surgeon in Greencastle, Pennsylvania. In 1800, he took his degree of Doctor of Medicine in the medical department of the University of Pennsylvania. During the war of 1812 he served as a surgeon, and after its termination commenced the practice of medicine in Gettysburg, but afterwards, in 1807, located in Harrisburg, as in consequence of its selection as the seat of government the place promised to become one of importance. In this field he rapidly rose to deserved eminence, establishing a large and lucrative practice. His counsel and aid were sought after, not only by

his professional brethren in Harrisburg, but throughout the different counties of middle and western Pennsylvania.

In 1803, Dr. Agnew married Miss Jane Grier. Her mother was a Holmes—a prominent family of Carlisle. The issue of this marriage was six children, three sons and three daughters. Two of these children, a son and daughter, died in childhood. The oldest son, Rev. John Holmes Agnew, D. D., a sketch of whom will appear in this volume, became distinguished for his scholarly attainments and literary position. The next child, Mary Ann, died in early life, in Uniontown, Pa., where her brother was Pastor of the Presbyterian Church. She was regarded as a young lady of great loveliness of character, as well as devoted piety. A second son, the Hon. Judge James C. Agnew, died at Edina, Missouri, March 1st, 1870, greatly lamented by the citizens of Knox county, to whom he was well known, and among whom he had for many years occupied several responsible civil positions, and discharged the duties of Eldership in the Presbyterian Church. During the war of the Rebellion he entered the Union Army as Commissary of one of its regiments, his two sons entering with him, the one as Lieutenant, the other as a private.

His surviving daughter became the wife of Rev. John R. Agnew, at present of Greencastle, a man of fine culture as a scholar, and a noble Christian gentleman.

As a physician, Dr. Agnew possessed a rare combination of qualities. Thoroughly conversant in the literature, and familiar with the resources of his profession, his opinions were always received with respect by his medical friends. Though pressed with the arduous duties of an extensive and laborious practice, he occasionally contributed to the periodical medical literature of the day, and was often called upon to deliver literary, scientific, and religious addresses. His paper on the "Intermittents of the Susquehanna Region," is one of great merit, and attracted the notice of men eminent in the profession. The late Professor Samuel Jackson, of the University of Pennsylvania, spoke in the most complimentary terms of both his learning and skill, and on one occasion remarked to Rev. Dr. Dewitt, that "if he had an only son dangerously ill, there was no physician between Philadelphia and New Orleans whose services he would rather have, than those of Dr. Agnew."

The Rev. T. H. Robinson, in his "Historical Address on the Ruling Elders of the First Presbyterian Church of Harrisburg," says: "few men, have been better fitted in natural talents, in education, in personal character, and in public position, than Dr. Agnew, for a wide

and permanent influence of the best and highest kind over their fellow-men. He was a man of notable qualities. In the eye of the world he was one of the marked men of society; and both in social and professional life, as well as in the church, he was promptly accorded a place as a leader.

“Though a charming social companion, and distinguished member of the medical profession, Dr. Agnew was not less prominent in the church. He led a consistent and godly life, and rarely allowed his duties as a physician to prevent his regular attendance on the public services of the sanctuary. He was a ruling Elder in the First Presbyterian Church of Harrisburg, for fifteen years.”

As an evidence of the high estimation in which Dr. Agnew was held, at the special request and on motion of such a man as Jeremiah Evarts, he was, in 1826, elected a corporate member of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions. To any agency of the church, whether Sunday schools, Bible, Tract, or Temperance societies, he gave an active and hearty support. He was emphatically an active, earnest, public spirited Christian.

The Rev. W. M. Paxton, D. D., in a sermon delivered at Greencastle after the death of Dr. Agnew, from Psalm xxxvii, 37, “Mark the perfect man and behold the upright, for the end of that man is peace,” took occasion to speak of him as one to whom this Scripture might apply with more than ordinary propriety. Quoting from that sermon, he says, “As a man Dr. Agnew exhibited an assemblage of interesting qualities. He had a mind sound, clear and discriminating, naturally vigorous but strengthened and polished by a regular course of collegiate discipline, expanded by extensive professional study and matured by the experience of a protracted life. His literary taste was cultivated and correct. To a vigorous and cultivated intellect he added all the finer qualities of heart. He was characterized by an expansive benevolence of feeling. To the old and the young of every class and condition he was uniformly tender and affectionate. His heart appeared to overflow with the milk of human kindness. In his domestic and social relations, he won for himself the most endeared affection; he was a devoted husband, a loving father, and an affectionate friend. The natural serenity and cheerfulness of his temper gave a charm to his old age, and the affability and dignified unobtrusiveness of his manners elicited the respect and esteem of all who knew him. He was esteemed as a public spirited citizen, was honoured as a generous, self-sacrificing philanthropist, and valued as a steadfast, sympathizing friend.” Again, in speaking of the religious side of his

character, he says: "It was as a *Christian* that Dr. Agnew shone pre-eminently. A warm hearted but rational piety was the great leading feature of his character; it was the pervading and controlling principle of his public and private life. He died on the 23d of November, 1849, in the seventy-third year of his life. His death was as gentle and as quiet as a summer evening; as calm as when an autumn sun sinks below the western horizon, and as its beams gild the bending sky, long after the great body of flame is out of sight, so do the delightful memories of his life linger in the thoughts and hearts of men.