

THE HISTORY
OF
PRESBYTERIANISM
IN
ARKANSAS

1828-1902

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REV. JOSHUA F. GREEN.

Rev. Joshua Fry Green.

BY REV. S. W. DAVIES, D. D.,

FAYETTEVILLE, ARK.

Joshua Fry Green was born in Boyle County, Ky., December 20, 1821. He came of a talented and distinguished family. His father, Judge John Green, of Danville, Ky., was a leading lawyer and jurist in Kentucky, when such men as Henry Clay, Tom Marshall, and the Breckinridges adorned her bar. His uncle, Rev. Dr. Lewis W. Green, president of Hampden Sidney College, Virginia, and afterwards of Center College, Kentucky, was one of the most eloquent preachers and greatest educators of his day. His mother, Sally Adams Fry, was a sister of Judge Fry, of Wheeling, Va., and noted for her strength of character, her intellectual abilities and her spiritual graces. In the life of Dr. Lewis W. Green, a high tribute is paid to her godliness, her fidelity to the truth and her active usefulness among her contemporaries. It is said of her that she exerted a powerful influence in the wide circle of her acquaintance, in stemming the tide of French infidelity that swept over Kentucky, in common with the rest of the country, in the early part of the last century. Mr. Green inherited much of the fire, force and eloquence of his father and uncle, together with the devout piety and spiritual power of his gifted mother.

He was converted and united with the church of his fathers before he completed his course in college. He received his collegiate education at Center College, from which institution he was graduated when he was only eighteen.

At first he wished to study law, and set out from home with the intention of going to Wheeling to enter the office of Judge Fry. But while on his way a change in his views and purposes took place. The conviction came upon him that he must preach the gospel. Paul's words rang in his ear, "Woe is unto me if I preach not the gospel." And instead of going to Wheeling to become a lawyer, he went

to Princeton and entered the theological seminary there to prepare himself for the work of the ministry.

After completing his course at the theological seminary, his first charge was Springfield, Washington County, Ky. It was here that he met his wife, Miss Harriet Frances Booker, a daughter of Major William Booker, of Springfield, to whom he was married in 1844.

Springfield and Washington County were then one of the strongholds of Romanism in Kentucky. The Roman Catholics had there two schools, one for boys and one for girls. They largely outnumbered the other churches, and possessed and exercised a powerful influence over the social and political life of the community. This naturally made them arrogant and aggressive, and compelled Protestantism to fight for its very existence in the community. It was this state of things in the community where he was first called to labor, doubtless, that was the immediate occasion of his entering upon that vigorous war upon the claims, pretensions and corruptions of Romanism, which he there began, and which he afterwards prosecuted here in Arkansas with such remarkable power and success. His temperament, his training and his studies set him at war with Romanism in all its aspects. And in a struggle such as he was compelled to maintain in Springfield, he was not a man who could be content simply to occupy an attitude of defense. "He carried the war into Africa." He went to the bottom of the great controversy between Protestantism and Romanism. He procured and studied the standard authorities of the Church of Rome; and assailed his adversaries with such fullness of knowledge, and such convincing logic and eloquence as not only to put them completely on the defensive, but to leave them no tenable ground upon which to stand. The result was that the eyes of the community were opened, wavering adherents to Protestantism were confirmed in their allegiance to their principles, and many through his preaching were led to renounce the errors of Romanism and embrace the truth.

He continued in charge of the church at Springfield about three years. From Springfield he was called to Paris, Bourbon County, Ky. Paris is in the heart of the Blue Grass region of Kentucky. It was an intelligent, cultured

and delightful community; and the church there was one of the strongest and best in the State. Concerning his work at Paris, we have no definite information, but there is good reason to believe that his ministry in that church was maintained on the same high plane of efficiency and fruitfulness which characterized his work at Springfield. For we have testimony that "Before he left Kentucky, he was held in high repute as a man of great promise."

In 1847, after he preached at Paris three years, he resigned the pastorate of that church and accepted a call to Little Rock, Ark. There was a wide contrast between the field which he left, and that to which he went, and humanly speaking, it involved a great sacrifice on his part to make the change. He was then just twenty-six years old; the pastor of one of the most delightful charges in the Synod of Kentucky, with talents, reputation and abilities that insured for him rapid promotion if he remained in Kentucky. On the other hand, it was "The day of small things" in Arkansas, Little Rock, and the church there. The State had only recently emerged from a territorial condition. Its great resources were to a large extent unknown, and only a beginning had been made towards its settlement and development. Little Rock was a small town with scarcely two thousand inhabitants, with no immediate prospect for future growth and greatness. "The church at the time of his arrival," says an old record, "Was in a state of extreme depression." Its house of worship was a dilapidated old wooden building on Main Street, between Second and Third Streets, and its members were few in number and limited in means. Literally there was absolutely nothing to attract him, save the needs and possibilities of the vast Home Mission field of which it was the center and the key. And it is a striking evidence of the disinterested and self-sacrificing zeal, devotion and consecration of the man, and at the same time of his far-seeing wisdom, sagacity and foresight, that he was willing to relinquish the brilliant prospects that were before him, and come to such a field. Results justified the wisdom of his choice. The years which he spent in Arkansas, in their immediate and in their remote effects, were the richest and most fruitful years of his ministry; and the work which he was enabled to accomplish, first as pastor of the church in Little Rock, and afterwards as missionary, superintendent

and evangelist of the synod, proved to be the great work of his life. Unfortunately but meagre accounts of his life and work here in Arkansas have been preserved in the official records of the church. The materials of the imperfect sketch which follows have been gathered from the minutes of the synod of Arkansas, from notices of him which appeared in the church papers at the time of his death, and from his letters to his wife, while acting as missionary agent and evangelist of the synod, a tolerably full file of which has been preserved.

From 1847 to 1853, he was Stated Supply of the church at Little Rock. At the time of his arrival in this place, the church, as we have seen, was in a state of extreme depression. It was not only weak, but discouraged and almost hopeless, save that a few faithful women in it had been meeting and praying that God would send them a preacher; that He would strengthen him and use him to establish and build up His cause in Little Rock and in Arkansas. Under Mr. Green's wise and energetic leadership, by the blessing of God on his enlightened zeal, enterprise, his faithful and self-sacrificing labors, and in answer to these prayers, the church was revived, reorganized and put on a good foundation. The old wooden building on Main Street was disposed of, and a handsome and substantial brick edifice was erected on East Markham Street, between Cumberland and Rock Streets. The church was given a standing and an influence in the community which it has ever since maintained, and an impulse towards growth and expansion, which has enabled it to keep pace with the progress of the city, and to which we are in no small degree indebted for the high position which the Presbyterian Church now holds in Little Rock.

At the first meeting of the synod of Arkansas, October 14, 1852, an overture from the Board of Missions, proposing to employ Rev. J. F. Green as evangelist to labor at large among the destitutions of our state, was received, and the following resolution was adopted in response to it, to-wit: "Resolved, That this synod is exceedingly gratified at the proposed appointment of Brother J. F. Green as missionary agent and evangelist for the State of Arkansas, and would express the earnest hope that the proposed arrangement will be promptly consummated." This appointment of the Board

of Missions, thus enforced by the hearty and unanimous approval of his brethren of the synod of Arkansas, Mr. Green felt it to be his duty to accept. And with characteristic promptness and energy he resigned his charge of the church at Little Rock and entered upon it January 1, 1853.

The work to be done was of immense magnitude and difficulty, involving great labor, privation and hardship. The territory to be covered was co-extensive with the limits of the state, and the little churches to be visited, ministered to and cared for were scattered from Batesville and Lawrence County, in the extreme northern part of the State, to Camden, El Dorado, and Washington, in the southern and southwestern borders; and from Helena on the east to Fort Smith, Fayetteville and Bentonville in the west and northwest. There were no railroads and few other facilities for travel. The country was new, the settlements were scattered, the roads were bad, and frequently not easy to find, and the only available means of getting about was on horseback, necessitating long rides, through cold and heat, often through rain and storm, mud and mosquitoes, and over swollen streams without bridges or ferries, with nothing to look forward to at night but the rude accommodations of the pioneer's cabin.

Into this work, with a full knowledge of its privations, trials and hardships, he threw himself with all the zeal and enthusiasm of his nature, and in it he continued to within one month of his death, which occurred August 1, 1854—a period of eighteen months. These months were to him months of ceaseless, intense and indefatigable activity. By the first of July, 1854, when he went to visit the church at Frankfort, Kentucky, to which he had been called, he had nearly completed the second visitation of the churches of the synod. No part of the wide field had been overlooked or neglected. No church, however weak, or insignificant or remote was passed by. He rode all over the state, preaching almost daily, holding meetings, guiding souls to Christ in the inquiry room and at the fireside, strengthening and confirming weak churches, gathering the scattered adherents of our church into new organizations, and raising money to support missionaries and to build churches.

As a result he became widely known throughout the state; and what was of greater importance, by his zealous

and indefatigable labors as evangelist, his noble and manly defense of the doctrines of the church, his eloquence and power as a preacher of the gospel, and his able and successful efforts in opposing the encroachment of Romanism, not only was the Presbyterian Church greatly strengthened and benefited, but a firm foundation was laid for that ascendancy which evangelical Protestant Christianity has since attained and still maintains in this state.

The estimation in which he was held by his cotemporaries, and the value which they placed upon his work will appear from the following testimonials. The first, is taken from a communication which was published in one of our church papers just after his death, and is as follows: "As an evangelist he became extensively known throughout the State of Arkansas, and was admired and loved by everybody, for he was possessed of superior powers and a noble soul. His friendships were ardent and sincere, his manners agreeable and easy. As an able, fearless and successful controversialist he will long be remembered in this state. But his highest praise is, that he was, in the truest sense of the word, a preacher of the gospel. His thorough knowledge of the system of revealed truth, his own great thoughts, deep convictions, intense feelings, fervid, vehement and lucid style and overwhelming energy, made every congregation which had the privilege of hearing him feel that they were listening to no common man. The zeal of his ministry is in souls redeemed through his instrumentality, who mourn his loss as that of a spiritual father, and churches, not a few, re-established and strengthened by his labors. Taken away in the flower of his manhood and his usefulness, his death is an irreparable loss to our church and to our community."

The second, is the following resolution adopted by the presbytery of Arkansas after his death, to-wit: "That we will long cherish in affectionate remembrance his fidelity in attending upon the courts of the church; his zealous and indefatigable labors as a pastor and missionary; his noble and manly defense of the doctrines of our church; his earnest and affectionate appeal to the hearts and consciences of sinners, and his untiring and successful efforts in opposing the encroachments of the man of sin."

It is from his own letters, however, that we get the clearest insight into the spirit and character of the man, and

the fullest and most reliable information concerning the work which he accomplished during this most active and fruitful period of his ministry. These letters, written only for the eyes of his wife, not only justify the estimate of his character and work expressed in the testimonies quoted above, but confirm and strengthen it.

They reveal, in the first place, his attractive personality, in which genial and manly strength, energy and enthusiasm were happily blended with gentleness and tenderness. Of the toil, the privations and the hardships of the work he never uttered a word of complaint; but the absence from home and the separation from his family which it necessitated, he deeply and keenly felt. Writing from Van Buren November 1, 1853, he says: "I shall go to Fort Smith tomorrow to hold a meeting there as long as may seem proper. Thence I shall go home; sweet, sweet word to me, I assure you. Nothing but a conviction of the usefulness of my present work would lead me to sacrifice the pleasures of home as I do. But I know God will keep and bless my loved ones in my absence. He has done so and will still do it. I trust Him." Again, later, he writes: "To be separated so much is a trial to me as well as to yourself. Yet if you could see the crowds without a shepherd who flock to hear the word of life, you would at least try to be reconciled to it."

Another characteristic constantly exhibited in these letters is his simple and unquestioning faith in God, and his deep and earnest piety. His faith was a living, comforting, sustaining principle; and not only this but a working principle, working by love and leading him to a sincere and hearty consecration of himself and all his gifts and powers to the service of his Divine Master. Thus writing from Augusta, June 26, 1854, only a little over a month before his death, he says: "I am well; thanks to a kind Providence, and have hope and trust to feel that you and the children are also cared for and kept in health and will be until my return. When I recount the mercies of our God, my heart, I trust, is at least, not unmindful of the source whence they come; and I feel that my poor life is but a slight return for such goodness to us and to ours." The same simple and beautiful faith, and love breathe through all of his earlier letters. Thus

on his arrival at Fayetteville, October 5, 1853, being disappointed at not hearing from home, he writes: "Not that I anticipated any bad news. * * * For I have faith to believe that God will protect and keep those whom I love so much, while I am engaged in His service."

How much these professions coming from him, meant, is shown by the unselfish and self-sacrificing devotion which he manifested in the prosecution of his work, which is another thing that is strikingly brought out in these letters. The following itinerary, taken from the headings of his letters written during 1853, will give some idea of his intense and untiring activity, and of the immense and arduous labors which he underwent during this period. January 6 he was at Napoleon, where the Arkansas then emptied into the Mississippi River, on his way to Helena, on the extreme eastern border of the state. February 16, he was at Rockport, in the southern part of the state, on his way to Camden, where he held a meeting of two or three weeks' duration. March he seems to have spent in visiting and preaching in the country around Camden. April 5, he is at Washington, Hempstead County, in the southwestern part of the state, where he labored for several weeks. Thence he went to Tulip and Princeton and other points in the vicinity. May 5 he writes from El Dorado, near the southern border of the state, where he labored for two or more weeks. May 18, he is again at Washington, just from a visit to Columbus. Thence he returned to Little Rock, visiting and preaching at Arkadelphia and other points on the way. June he perhaps spent at Little Rock with his family, taking a much needed rest, and visiting and preaching at points contiguous to that place; for his next letter is dated from Batesville, July 11. After laboring here for some time, he went to Smithville, in Lawrence County, in the extreme northern part of the state. Here and in the regions round about he spent the rest of July and part of August, returning to Little Rock in the latter month. September 13, he is at Van Buren, in the western part of the state, attending the meeting of the synod at that point. After the adjournment of synod he held a meeting at Van Buren, lasting until about the first of October. October and November were occupied in continuous preaching, at Bentonville, Fayetteville, Cane Hill, and Fort Smith, at each of which places meetings were held. And

at the close of the year, December 26, we find him at Jacksonport, in the northeastern part of the state. The journey to Napoleon and to Helena was doubtless made by steamboat. The points in the other three sections of the state could only be reached on horseback. When we consider the immense distances covered in these journeys, and the inconveniences, discomforts, hardships, and dangers of travel in those early days, this itinerary presents a record of energy, enterprise, heroic endurance and consecrated devotion to duty that justly entitles him to an honorable position among the heroes of modern missions.

But the chief interest of these letters is the light which they throw upon the results of these manifold labors, viz: the great and beneficent work which he was instrumental in accomplishing for the cause of God in this state. It is a striking testimony to his humility and modesty, that he does not appear to have been conscious of the full extent and importance of the work he was doing. He does, indeed, speak of being "Driven on by the stern sense of duty, in a work which seems to be the life of all our little churches in this whole region," and he describes in a brief and simple way the effects that followed his preaching; but there is no hint that he was conscious of his great power as a preacher, or that he realized the far-reaching influence of his work on the future of the church in this state. No one, however, can read his letters and fail to be impressed with his extraordinary gifts and powers as a man and as a preacher, and the depth and power and extent of the work which he accomplished. He was not simply a successful revivalist, as that term is commonly understood in our day, he was a great gospel preacher, and his preaching was in demonstration of the spirit and of power. For this reason, it was almost invariably accompanied by spiritual results, not merely in the great meetings which he held, but even when he preached by the way, as he often did in his journeyings from point to point.

The meetings which he held, almost without exception, were characterized by wonderful manifestations of the spirit's power and presence. There were large congregations, profound attention, deep interest, and many conversions and additions to the churches. And the effects upon the churches and the community in which they were held were happy and

abiding. The churches of the synod, which at that period of their history were in a weak, struggling and depressed condition, were strengthened, encouraged, established, and placed in a position favorable for future growth and usefulness. And the communities around them, then in a formative state, if not brought under the sanctifying and saving influences of the gospel, were taught to honor and revere it; and in consequence were brought into an attitude more favorable toward hearing and receiving it.

As illustrating the general character and happy results of these meetings the accounts given in these letters of the meetings at Fayetteville and Fort Smith will serve as examples.

Two letters written from Fayetteville, while the meeting there was in progress, have been preserved. In the first he writes, "We are now in the midst of a deep and widening revival of religion in this place. I am preaching every night to crowded houses. People ride four and five miles to preaching. We visit in the day and hold prayer meetings. What will be the result, I cannot tell. I think it would be a sin to leave now. * * * I am in good health, and but for a longing to see you and the dear little ones, I am contented and happy, for I feel that I am doing good. Pray for me that God may keep and bless me in His work."

Later, he writes, "Our meeting is still in progress every day and night, attended by crowded congregations and anxious people who seem to desire to hear and learn the truth. There have been some fifteen or twenty professions of faith and many more are deeply anxious to learn what they shall do to be saved. The meeting is marked by a deep stillness, as solemn as death and as earnest as life. * * * Dear wife, pray for me that God may bless and strengthen me to carry on His work. Oh, it is pleasant to labor thus in His cause."

There are no indications in either of these letters as to the length of time the meeting lasted. But from the date of a letter written from Van Buren after leaving Fayetteville, we are justified in inferring that it must have continued not less than two weeks, and probably longer. We have four written from Fort Smith while the meeting there was in progress. In the first of these, dated November 3, 1853, he

writes, "Here I am in this place. A sort of Babel and Gomorrah. I arrived here last night; found the people of the church expecting me and prepared for a meeting. I did not preach last night, feeling the need of rest for a short time prior to commencing another seige of preaching. My health has been good—never better—though I am a little thinner than when our meeting began in Fayetteville. * * *

I hope we shall have a good meeting here. * * * I shall stay here as long as there is a prospect of doing good by staying." The next letter is dated eleven days later. In it he says, "I write to say to you that I fear I shall not be able to be at home next Saturday. I do not think it would be right to leave here as yet. We have received four persons into the church on examination, and the congregation is four times as large as it ordinarily is, and just as attentive as they can be. A deep solemnity pervades the people and we may hope, I think, for a good and precious season. I am, oh, so anxious to see you and the little ones, but I do not think I ought to go as things are now. I am well, and keep well, though preaching every day; am, however, somewhat worn by so much labor." November 16, two days later, he says, "We had a precious meeting last night. The night before last I preached to an overflowing house on Romanism. Last night we received two persons in the church, one of them a Roman Catholic by birth and education. I baptized her in the presence of a large assembly. The interest is widening and deepening. I know not as yet where it will end. The state of things here rejoices my heart, while it disappoints my fond hope of being at home this week." The next and last letter is dated November 18; he says, "Yesterday evening our inquiry meeting was well attended by some of the hitherto most hardened sinners of the place. The work seems to be deepening. So that I cannot leave here before next Monday."

This remarkable meeting it thus appears must have continued about three or four weeks.

Few remain among us who attended these meetings, and fewer still that were old enough at the time when they occurred to give any intelligible account of them at the present time. It has been the privilege of the writer of this sketch to meet a few such persons in Fayetteville and Washington County, and he finds that the memory of Mr. Green

and of the profound and widespread impression produced by his preaching and his labors in that section of the state is still fresh in their minds.

Other phases of his work in these eventful months are brought out in the following extracts:

Writing from El Dorado he says, "I preached yesterday to a little country congregation between this place and Camden. There was much deep feeling. One young man, unconverted, wept nearly all the time of the latter half of the sermon. One man gave me for missions \$10. I think I shall be able to raise \$200 in this county for that cause. I find a liberal spirit pervading the few people we have here." In another letter from the same place, written later, he says, "I raised \$40 here last Sunday, and shall do quite well in this county, God helping me." In a letter written from Jacksonport, and dated December 26, 1853, he says, "I reached here on last Thursday evening, through the cold, quite well and comfortable, thanks to my good blanket, for which I found use not only by day, but also by night. I place it next to me when I sleep to keep me warm. It is also clean, which cannot always be said of the sheets. I got two lots for a church at Grand Glaise, a new town on White River, where I stopped and preached the other night. I shall put on foot the building of a church here (in Jacksonport) before I leave." The result of this effort is thus given in a letter written subsequently from another place. "Before leaving Jacksonport I took up a collection for Home Missions—about \$58—I hope to increase it. I also did something more for our church building there. I got subscribed \$200, making in all \$1,500, which will build a neat house."

Thus continually at work, and wherever he went, even though he tarried but for one night, something was done for the cause of Him whom he loved.

In the summer of 1854 he received an urgent call from the church at Frankfort, Ky., to become its pastor. In response to this call, he felt it to be his duty to visit the church before deciding what he would do. On his return from Frankfort, he was taken sick at Louisville, Ky., but anxious to reach home, he took passage on a steamer going down the river. On reaching Memphis, not wishing to

travel on the Sabbath, and being still quite unwell, he was taken by Dr. Gray, the pastor of the church there, to his home. Here cholera developed, and after a brief illness he passed peacefully and calmly to his eternal reward in the thirty-fourth year of his age.

Such an ending to such a career is one of those profound mysteries of Divine Providence before which we must stand dumb. We cannot understand or explain it, but must in faith and patience wait until God, by the gradual unfolding of His wise and gracious plans, makes it plain.

Mr. Green was a man of rare natural gifts and endowments. He was tall, broad-shouldered, nervous and muscular in his physical development, and capable of great exertion and endurance. His natural disposition was open, frank, generous, fearless, impulsive, daring, energetic, and aggressive. His feelings were ardent and intense. His intellectual gifts were of a high order, including quickness, clearness and accuracy of conception, sound judgment, and broad common sense. His moral qualities were equally conspicuous. His views of truth and duty were unequivocally clear and decided, his convictions were sincere and deep, and he had the courage of his convictions. This aggressive positiveness, and strength of character, combined with his wonderful power of speech, made him a born leader of men. These natural gifts and endowments were cultivated and improved by education and use, and softened, refined, elevated and sanctified by divine grace; and the happy combination made him the honored, trusted, loved husband, father and friend that he was in private life, and the eminent, successful and useful minister of the gospel that he was in his public and official career.

The following anecdote, related of him by his nephew, John Barkley, of Kentucky, is worthy of being preserved: "Some years ago," says Mr. Barkley, "I was going down the river to New Orleans. One afternoon I took my seat on the deck of the steamer. My next neighbor was a gray-haired venerable looking man, with whom I soon fell into conversation. After we had been talking for some time, learning that I was from Kentucky, he asked me: 'Did you ever hear of Joshua F. Green, formerly of Kentucky?' 'Yes, sir; he is my uncle.' 'Is it possible,' said the man, bursting

into tears; 'that man was the means of saving my soul. Soon after he came to Little Rock, he came out to my neighborhood to preach. A number of us wild young lads determined that he should not preach. So we went to the place where the service was to be held, with the deliberate intention of creating a disturbance, and breaking up the meeting. Soon after Mr. Green began the services we began; and every time he attempted to proceed we began cutting up. After waiting a reasonable time, Mr. Green left the pulpit, walked down the aisle, and stopped at the pew in which I was sitting. Fixing his eyes on me, he said: "Young man, we have come here to worship God. If you are willing to behave yourself, you are welcome to remain; but if not, I will take you by the nape of the neck and pitch you out of the door." I looked him over, and saw that he meant business, and furthermore was able to do what he said. So I concluded to sit still and behave myself, and the sermon which I then heard was the means of converting my soul.'"

This capacity to attract and win those whom he felt it to be his duty to oppose and rebuke, oftentimes with sternness and severity, was strikingly exemplified in his controversies with the Roman Catholics. Though he preached on such subjects as "The Dangers of Papal Schools," "The Confessional Unveiled" and "The Man of Sin Delineated," and did it with such unflinching plainness and overwhelming power of argument as to produce great excitement and deep feeling and to lead many to renounce the errors of that system; yet some of the most ardent admirers and most loyal and faithful friends he had in Little Rock were Roman Catholics who never renounced their connection with the Roman Church. And after his death, they proved the sincerity of their devotion to him, by their life-long friendship and considerate and unflinching kindness to his family.

He possessed to a remarkable degree the power of impressing himself upon those with whom he came in contact. Young and old alike were impressed and attracted by his striking personality, as well as by his eloquence and power as a preacher. And those who still linger among us, of the men and women whose privilege it was to have known and heard him, are as ardent and enthusiastic in their

expressions of love and admiration for him, as if he had passed away but yesterday. Upon the whole we think impartial history will approve, as essentially correct, the estimate of his friend and successor, Dr. Thomas R. Welch. "Take him all in all, he was the grandest man we have ever had in this state in the ministry. His life, though short, was a great and successful one."