

REMINISCENCES of NANCY FARIS

by
DAVID S. FARIS

Nancy Faris, daughter of David Smith and Sarah Neil, was born at Rocky Creek, Chester District, S. C., Nov. 2, 1806.

Her parents were pious and exemplary. She was brought up to know and practice the principles of the Reformed Presbyterian Church. She could repeat the Shorter Catechism, asking questions from beginning to end, almost without mistake. The Larger Catechism she could answer almost verbatim. She also read several solid religious books, and had a good understanding of the cardinal doctrines of the Bible.

Her secular education was slight, yet she was a good reader and spell-er - in fact was Father's spelling dictionary. She wrote a legible hand, and her composition was correct. Her knowledge of arithmetic was sufficient to enable her to do her own counting. This was done in the head rather than by book rule.

In personal appearance she was very much like her father - tall, crooked, thin and wiry. Her head was long shaped, and square at the front. She had good brain development. Her eyes were bluish gray; her nose, high, thin, sharp and straight; her lips thin and firmly compressed; her mouth small; her features fine and angular. The skin was dark, the flesh firm, the limbs were slender - she was made for locomotion and action. In youth she was handsome, and indeed was rather a good looking old lady, though her face was well marked by the furrows of age. One side of the face and one shoulder were a little larger than the other. Her hair was black with a slight tinge of reddish brown. It was thick, fine, curly, and would not divide in the middle, nor by a clear cut straight line. It showed but little gray even at the age of seventy-four. Her weight in her prime was one hundred and twenty - in her declining years in the neighborhood of one hundred.

The eyes were weak. From twenty she began occasionally to use glasses for fine work, and put on two pair for such work when she was old. She wore glasses to see in the distance.

She was tough, yet her health was somewhat precarious. From about twenty years of age she had a cough with a hectic flushing of the cheeks. Her friends feared that it was a sign of disease of the lungs. Time proved that it was not of the lungs but of the stomach, for she spit dark venous blood from about forty-five years of age - taking a spell about once a month. As she grew older the blood spitting was less frequent. Her stomach was always weak. She had pains and aches which denoted indigestion and a torpid liver. She was very subject to nightmare, from the stagnation of blood about her stomach. Some of these symptoms increased with age, and consumption of the stomach and bowels carried her off. She had several attacks of pneumonia - the last some three years before her death, reduced her very low - she was watched to die all night, but rallied and recovered her usual health, though not quite her usual strength.

She was a very great worker - scarcely ever hired a girl - did all her own washing, cleaning, and kitchen work, with occasional help from the boys. For many years she made nearly all the clothing. The summer wear was made of flax in Indiana - of cotton in the South. The flax was spread out thin in the field to rot. It was then broken. Father broke the flax as this was heavy work. He stood on the left side of the brake, the right hand took hold of the handle and chopped the upper part up and down, while the left hand held the flax and whipped it out and in until the woody fiber was completely broken up and much of it shaken out at the feet of the operator.

The brake was a rude, home-made machine, standing on four legs, as high as a work bench, and about half as long, and half as wide. The lower part had four white oak bars an inch thick at the under side, but brought to a round edge on top, fastened by mortise in the heavy blocks that held the legs, before and behind, and set wider behind so as to make the machine taper forwards. The upper part had three similar bars placed thin edge downwards and was hinged like the lower jaw of an animal, the bars so spaced as to fall between those of the lower part. The head of the movable part was a heavy piece of oak, the weight being of use to break the flax. A round stick above, and parallel with these upper bars, served as a handle.

The next process was scutching. This was done by Mother. A strong oak board was set upright, firmly fastened and the top end dressed by rounding off the angles. A two edged oaken knife two feet long, and four or five inches broad was held in the right hand - the flax in the left, thrown over the top of the board. First one end and then the other was chopped with the knife and cleared of shoals and worthless tow.

They took a day and father broke and mother scutched and thus a pile of flax fiber in the rough state was prepared. On the following day mother hackled the bunches one at a time and thus the material was made ready for the wheel.

The hackle was an instrument like a hairbrush of iron only the teeth were very coarse. The flax was drawn through and through like combing hair. The result was a hank of pure lint, and a bunch of tow. In my earliest recollections both were spun and made into cloth. The tow served for coarse wear, and the lint for the finer goods. With tow pantaloons, scratching was superfluous, for one had enough of this from the rough garment. The flax fibre was thinly spread on a frame called a rock. This, in the backwoods, was made of a bough of dogwood, or sugar maple, having a main stem with four equidistant branches coming out of the same joint. The bark was stripped off, all were cut one length and tied together at the top. Below the joint it was dressed to enter a crane-like arm that stood up from the block of the wheel and turned to suit the convenience of the operator. The rock turned in its socket and gave off the fibre, which was turned into thread and thrown on a spool by the flyers which were driven by a hand from the wheel.

A foot wheel was used for spinning. Mother spent much of her time at the wheel - now spinning flax and tow for summer - and now wool for winter clothing. I can scarcely think of her in my early days, without thinking of the wheel.

The sheep were shorn in the spring. Till the boys grew up Mother did the clipping. The wool was washed, dried, picked, sent to the carding machine and made into rolls. It was then spun on the foot wheel, or by some the big wheel was used, which was turned by hand, the operator standing, or rather tripping around and back and forth. This was a speedier operation than spinning with the foot-wheel. The yarn was home dyed and sent to the weaver.

During all this work of preparation and spinning; the washing, the kitchen work, and the making and mending had to be done. This made a busy year for the women. They often made a "woolpicking", as the men made log-rolling. But Mother thought that time, and a good deal of hard work, cooking, might have been saved, if every one did her own work; besides one is more likely to do her own work well.

Time changed bye and bye. All the goods for clothing were furnished in the stores, often ready-made. For the spinning and weaving of former times, came keeping of parlor, dusting and sweeping; a variety of cooking; and canning of fruits. So there still is no rest for the women.

Mother was a great mender, we thought she patched and mended till the garment was all one complicated, or variegated patch. Like the one horse shay, it was still the same identical garment.

Such was the economy of Father and Mother which provided for a large family, and left them an inheritance besides. A little of the same thing would not be a bad thing in their children and grand children. The spendthrift now may scatter to the winds what was slowly and painfully gathered.

Mother was brought up to work. In the South, where others had slaves, Covenanters did their own work.

Girls were then employed in the fields, as well as in the house. They planted and hoed corn and cotton; and picked cotton and pulled fodder. Mother never ate the bread of idleness, even in her girlhood. And before the period of girlhood was passed, she incurred the responsibility of wife and mother.

She was married to James Faris, Aug. 29, 1823. Their first child was born June 22, 1824. Next year May 9, 1825, Father started to Philadelphia with Isaac. It took them about four weeks to make the journey. He spent the summer and winter there. In the spring and summer of 1826, he travelled westward, then home to the South. While going West the child died of summer-complaint. He suffered severely for about a week. He was beginning to talk - had got a pair of new red-morocco shoes and when he was sick would say, "My shoe." The Mother's heart was pierced with great sorrow, "the sorrow for a first-born and for an only child," and the husband was not present to comfort her.

Then came another great trial, in the Fall of the same year - leaving her Father's home in the South and going to live in the great northwestern wilderness. They started October 17th and reached Bloomington, Indiana in the latter part of November. The journey made in a covered wagon, and camping out at night, seemed to the women a never ending one; but the men enjoyed it.

They lived first in a cabin on James Blair's place. There James was born. A farm belonging to Mr. Umstead, was bought for \$800.00, a hewed-log house was put up, and occupied before it was floored and finished. There I was born, and the rest of the children, including Sarah Jane.

I remember of the flooring of the house. A hewed-log kitchen was put up, a few feet west of the first, with a spacious entry and stairway between, and a broad and open porch on the north. This building and finishing meant work for Mother - boarding hands, shifting beds, dusting off, etc., etc. When we moved into the new place we went into the brick house, with open windows and doors, loose floors and rough brick walls. This was a repetition of the labor already gone through. In that open house died Sarah Jane, September 17, 1842 of acute bronchitis. She waked up sick early Sabbath morning, and died Saturday evening of mortification. It was warm and she was buried on Sabbath. Thus again sorrow visited the family. The mother that endured the agony of losing her firstborn son, had her heart pierced again by the death of her firstborn daughter. She was a lovely child - fine featured, bright and intelligent. From about a year old she could rock herself to sleep in the cradle, singing as she rocked. She rocked so hard the cradle almost went over, once she put it over, sure enough, against the wall, and was considerably hurt. The most beautiful flowers are plucked first.

Thirteen more years of toil were added, during which the new farm was improved and enlarged; the house finished and made comfortable; the three oldest boys came of age; the three youngest children were born. On May 20, 1855, the happy sojourn together of husband and wife ended in his departure

from the earthly state, and the mother was left alone with several young children to be brought up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. Thirty-two years she was a busy wife and mother, twenty-two years she trode the solitary path of widowhood. During this last period she saw all her children married and settled - from Vermont to Colorado - Divided in Jacob and scattered in Israel. The last eight or ten years she lived the greater part in Illinois, first with David (a year or so, back in Indiana with James after the death of his wife) and then with Mary after her Marriage to M. H. McKelvy. She spent the year preceding her death, with Isaiah who had been left with four motherless children in the fall of 1879.

Her letters to Father, when at the Theological Seminary, and travelling, breathe a spirit of fervent piety. Strong minded, she was yet womanly. There was no affectation in her manners. Simple and sincere, she detested foppery and flirtation. She was humble, modest and retiring, among female acquaintance she talked freely enough; but not with glib, ungoverned tongue - too common in gatherings of women. Yet she often blamed herself for remarks, which upon reflection, she thought had better not to be made. Her talk to the children was from the heart to the heart. Besides teaching them the catechisms she gave them practical lessons about heaven, hell, God and Christ, justification and good works. From her lips I first learned the sinfulness of sin, and that self-righteousness will not justify. "What can a woman do?" say some. Better say, "What cannot a woman do?" It is the mother that makes the coming man. Her husband may be the pattern, but she does the molding and finishing. So long as there are sterling mothers, we can be sure of the coming generation. But the decay of womanly virtue brings the wreck of morality and manhood. It may be that woman did her best when she contented herself with giving to the world sons and daughters brought up in the fear of God. Whatever more she may do, this is her proper sphere, in which her best impressions are communicated to the race. Such a mother must needs have been a praying woman. She was as regular at her morning and evening devotions as the sun to rise and set. Often have I heard the voice of fervent prayer from some closet or out-house, in the gray dawn of morning, and again in the evening twilight. The time she was absent of such duties told of her wrestling in prayer for herself, her husband, her children, and the church of God. I have been with her a few times, when too small to know what was said, but still it left its impression. She stately kept family worship, when Father was absent, which was often, and sometimes long. From these family prayers, I learned the things for which she importuned the throne of grace. I thought she was as pious and as holy as my conscience told me I ought to be. Sabbath was revered and the time well employed. Housekeeping was put by with little ceremony. Beds were spread but not made; no unnecessary work was done. Soon she was seated with the children about her, while Father was studying sermon, and Brown's short Catechism was asked throughout without a book. The children were kept at this till they knew all the answers. After this they learned the Shorter and Larger Catechisms till they were well committed to memory. Each child had a place to read in the Bible or Testament.

The morning catechising through, we got ready for church. All went if possible. When Mother could not go, she gathered the part of the family at home for worship at noon. In the evening Father catechised, and Mother and the children answered. At the close, there was occasionally a talk about practical religion, duty to God and man, joining the church young, as our parents had done, and sometimes a review of the sermon.

Mother taught all the children their letters. In my case this was so early that I have no distinct recollection of it. I remember having a paddle board book, made of a shingle, with a leaf pasted on either side, from the spelling book or the New England Primer, containing the alphabet and the

a-b-ads. My first distinct remembrance is reading my daily chapter in the New Testament, sitting beside Mother on a stool, while she plied the wheel. Mother gave us the start; Father took it up when we were ready to learn writing, Arithmetic, and Grammar.

Mother took the burdens of the family concerns on herself. Father, being considerably her senior, was growing less attentive to worldly matters, and was by nature slow to start a thing, and easy in mind. Mother looked after everything except the farm, and kept herself well informed even about it. She always wanted to know all about the things that concerned the family and its prosperity. If advice had been followed, several hundred dollars would not have been sunk in R. R. stock. Father never knew what money was in the purse, nor what accounts were to be paid. Mother had all these in mind, and knew what had to be paid first, and was calculating where the money was to come from. Butter and eggs stood over against current family accounts; Mother's butter was in demand for the supply of choice consumers. Money from the sale of hogs and stock, the salary, and the principle and interest of loans met large debts on land and buildings. Mother kept all these things in her head.

She would stand with the purse in her hand, after counting the money and cast up debts and credits to see how pecuniary matters stood. When thus in a brown study she would occasionally raise an eyebrow, in a way peculiar to herself - the other not moving. When she did this we knew that she was thinking. This particular inquisitiveness about everything became a habit; and, when living with the children, she always knew how their matters stood. While such a habit is apt to be thought meddlesome and disagreeable, it is after all the spirit that makes ends meet - pays debts, and carries on successful business. It is the secret of the military man's genius. By this a person knows what one can or cannot do. It keeps one from doing a haphazard business. It makes people honest, for it keeps away the temptation, that has led many a well meaning person to promise what there was not power to perform. Such a careful, diligent inspection of business, makes a person reliable in all agreements and contracts.

Mother did her share in washing the saint's feet, if not exactly in the literal sense, yet substantially the same. Not only the preachers lodged with us, but members of the church from a distance, at sacramental times they found bed and board. She had charge of my house during the vacant space that occurred between the death of the first and the marriage of the second wife. The same favor was also bestowed on James and Isaiah. The sojourn with Isaiah was the last great service of her life for her children. She got back to sister Mary's just in time - a little later she could not have made the journey.

The mother ought not perhaps be the principal disciplinarian. The husband is the head of the family, and the source of last resort in discipline. It is hard to tell which does most to mold the character, the fear inspired by the father, or the mother's love. It is certain the boys were not afraid of Mother's corrections. They were afraid of Father's. But her tearful talks and entreaties, though not always immediately successful, left us thoroughly convinced we were wicked. If we did not obey, the conscience was aroused to inflict a lasting sting. This tended to morality, if not also to conversion. Severe paternal corrections no doubt served to prevent overt acts of disobedience, and to form a law-abiding habit; but the much intreaty, with tears and brokenness of heart moved the deeper feelings, and laid the foundation for a renewed nature. The one represents the mercy and love, and the other the wrath of God. The one keeps in bounds from fear and punishment, the other elevates the nature and prepares it to become a law unto itself. A child thus trained will always think within itself, when about to

act, "What will my parents think?" and a regard for them, but especially for the tender heart of the mother, is a powerful influence for good.

Mother felt the burden of the younger children to be too great for her alone. She knew it was Father's desire to have his boys educated for the ministry. So she understood the last intelligent look he turned from her to them with a tear in his eye. It was a task for her to put them through college, without breaking into the real estate too soon. By renting their land to the older boys, and by strict economy, she managed to get them along till they could sell out their interest in the land. So great a task did this seem to one of the sisters, that she bade her not to undertake it. But believing it to be his wish, and herself desiring to have her children prepared for a useful life, she resolutely encountered the difficulty, and accomplished her purpose. It must have been a great satisfaction to her, as it were, to gather in the sheaves after a long seeding time of tears. Surely her life was not in vain - all her children in the church - four ministers, one elder, and two deacons, and her daughter married to a deacon.

She gradually went down from the Fall of 1880. Her attack began a week before she left Wisconsin and grew upon her till August 20, 1881, the date of her death. Not long after she got home she perceived that the end was approaching. She could scarcely eat anything that did not disagree with her. The bowels took spells of running off - sometimes without giving notice. The scrofulous scab on her right temple, first spread, yielding a whitish humor, but as the disease went more to the bowels, dried up. The skin became smooth, yellow, and cadaverous. Finally swelling of the feet appeared. Being upon a visit, she desired me to pray with her. This being done, I asked of her hope. She said, "I am not afraid to die." She then added, "It may be over confidence, but this is the feeling that I have." or words to that effect. This was a few weeks before her death. She desired Anna to go and stay with them and help wait on her. Anna went and did her best to please her Grandmother, who had done such a good part for her, when she was a motherless child. (When Mother and Mary arrived from Bloomington after Jane's death, her first words to Anna were, "Poor motherless Anna," - this was said with a choking voice, and a tear in the eye, and showed the tender heart that she possessed.)

At last I was sent for. She was worse and was going down rapidly. A dispatch to Bloomington was answered by the arrival of Thomas Friday night. She died Saturday morning after breakfast and worship. Uncle Thomas and wife (second wife) came on the 10 o'clock train. We prepared the body for the removal to Bloomington. The body was placed in the coffin, and the coffin in a large box which was surrounded with ice. Deodorizing chemicals were used to preserve the features, and prevent decomposition. Ice was also put within the coffin. She was dressed in her black suit according to her own request. Monday evening a fresh application of ice was made, and we started by rail for Bloomington. Thomas and I accompanied the coffin. But as it was in the hands of the express Company, it went by the Northern route, and we by the Southern. We arrived at noon Tuesday - the coffin at six o'clock. The funeral started from the cars. The friends met at the graveyard. The box and coffin were opened. All was found in a good state of preservation. The friends took their last view. It was closed up again forever - lowered into the grave by the side of Father - the body returned to the dust from which it was taken - the spirit having gone to the God who gave it.

"There is a calm for those that weep,
A rest for weary pilgrims found,
While they softly lie, and sweetly sleep,
Low in the ground."