

RECOLLECTIONS
OF THE
REV. JOHN McELHENNEY, D. D.

BY HIS GRANDDAUGHTER,

ROSE W. FRY.

"O good gray head which all men knew."

UNIVERSITY
OF VIRGINIA

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"I have been much afraid that the unremitted attention (as I have heard from all quarters) which you have given to the Doctor through the winter, would be the means of impairing your health. And now if you will yield too far to sorrow and rejection, this will add to the danger. But as God in his providence has involved on you the care of your children, your duty clearly is to take care of your health, that you may be able to attend to them; and may God's grace be sufficient for you. Your mother joins me in love to you and your dear children.

"I am your affectionate father,

"JOHN McELHENNEY."

One does not smile at this letter, although it reads like a bit of a sermon. The heart of the father breaks through its reserve, and we feel that he suffers, though enabled to *thank* God for the assurance of his child's eternal felicity. He does not bemoan the dead, but turns to console the living under "this awful trial." His work as a ministering servant still goes on, as we learn from his next letter:

"LEWISBURG, *March 15, 1854.*

"DEAR DAUGHTER: At the time I received your letter I was laboring under a severe attack of the neuralgia, which continued ten or twelve days. I am now in usual health with the exception of sore eyes, with which I am considerably afflicted, but not prevented from attending to my usual duties. The rest of the family are well.

"We are here in the midst of disease and death.

Such a time of death and affliction I have never experienced in this place but once before. We have already buried more than twenty in some four or five weeks. Since Susan wrote there have been several deaths, mainly among the colored people and children. There are some of your acquaintances dangerously ill at this time, except Mrs. Harvey Handly, who was taken on last Saturday, but was said to be better on last evening. The diseases which prevail are pneumonia and scarlet fever, both of which, I trust, will subside with the full opening of the spring.

"I hope you will make your calculations to spend the summer with us, as Martha and the children intend coming, and as John is here. I wish you and all the children to come, as this may be the last season we may all be together. And I trust before that time the place may be restored to its usual health. I have not fully decided whether I will attend the presbytery at Charleston or not, but as I hope you will all be here early in the summer, and as my health has not been good, I rather think I will not go. But should I determine otherways I will let you know.

"As to the time when Washington's remains are removed to this place is a matter left entirely with Martha to decide. But I wish you to write to me as soon as you can ascertain what is her wish on the subject, whether it is intended to remove them this summer, and what it will be necessary for me to do, as I am ready and willing to do everything in my power to effect the object.

"You must tell Martha that we are all very much pleased to hear that she and the children intend to

visit us this summer, especially, as we calculate, if we be spared, to spend it together. You must give my love, and the love of the family, to her, and the children, Mr. and Mrs. Jacob, Doctor Weed and family, Mrs. Niel and family, etc.

“You mentioned in your letter that Mr. Fry would be in Kanawha this month, but I suppose he does not intend to visit this place at this time. I hope his hands have gotten well.

“Your affectionate father,

“JOHN McELHENNEY.”

The Susan referred to in this letter was his youngest daughter. My aunt never left the old homestead, but remained to be the support of his declining years. Her devotion to him was supreme, and my grandfather relied upon her judgment in all perplexing matters. During his last illness she was his most untiring nurse, and injured her own health by unremitting attention to his necessities.

Shortly after her brother's death she opened a select school in the village, which she continued for many years, thus rendering herself independent. She had a fine personal appearance, and genuine dignity of manner. She was very tender-hearted, and possessed a quick sense of justice, which qualities she inherited from her father. She was very successful in winning the respect and love of her pupils, and, in addition, she possessed the art of progressing them in their studies.

Her piety was sound, but unobtrusive, and her generosity ever beyond her means. To a naturally