



Yours aff^l Brother in Christ
John M. Wherney

922573
18534

RECOLLECTIONS

OF THE

REV. JOHN McELHENNEY, D. D.

BY HIS GRANDDAUGHTER.

ROSE W. FRY.

“O good gray head which all men knew.”

Richmond, Va. :

WHITTET & SHEPPERSON, PRINTERS, 1001 MAIN STREET.

1893.

place, close by the southeast corner of the building in which the deceased had preached for more than sixty years.”

[*Editorial Notice in The Central Presbyterian, Jan. 4, 1871.*]

“REV. JOHN McELHENNEY, D. D.—A telegram informs us of the death of this venerable servant of God. The exact time is not mentioned, but it is supposed to have been on Sabbath night. He was not far from the great age of ninety years, and, it is believed, was the oldest minister in the Southern Presbyterian Church. His ministry began and ended in Lewisburg, West Virginia, where he was a pastor for more than sixty years. One of the truest, noblest, best of men has finished his course on earth. It was one of almost unexampled labor, but cheerfully, manfully borne. His departure will awaken many tender, solemn feelings among the thousands who loved and revered him as few men have been. A complete and suitable notice will doubtless be given.”

Next to Mr. Lacy's funeral discourse, the following tribute from Dr. Plumer was the most comprehensive and exhaustive. No man living understood my grandfather's character better, or had a warmer affection for him than his illustrious pupil. Time had not dimmed, nor absence altered their mutual esteem, extending over a period of fifty years. Dr. Plumer consulted his old preceptor in all the important moves of his life, and the last letter which passed between them related to his accepting a professorship in the Theological

Seminary in Columbia, S. C. My grandfather's last letter, in which he signs himself "Your affectionate brother in Christ," was penned to his old pupil :

[REV. WILLIAM S. PLUMER, D. D., in *The Central Presbyterian.*]

"REV. JOHN McELHENNEY, D. D.

"'Your fathers, where are they? and the prophets, do they live forever?'

"Dr. McElhenney has passed away from earth. He died on the morning of January 2, 1871. For months he had been wearing away, and growing weaker; and for a week before his death, without any special disease except cold, he had failed rapidly. Had he lived to the 22nd of March next, he would have been ninety years old.

"Dr. McElhenney was born in York District, South Carolina; graduated at Washington College, Lexington, Virginia; and in 1808 became the stated preacher of the counties of Monroe and Greenbrier, making Lewisburg his home. From the time of his settlement until too much enfeebled by age, that is, for more than fifty years, he travelled far and wide, and preached the gospel with great earnestness and success. His personal and ministerial influence was, of course, very great. My first acquaintance with him began fifty years ago last October, when I entered his classical school. He taught with great diligence and *éclat*. All his pupils admired him. At that time many important courts held their sessions in Lewisburg. Some of us greatly desired to hear such men as General Blackburn, Major Sheffey, Howe Peyton, General Baldwin, Chapman Johnson (Scotch), James Wilson, and other

great ornaments of the bar, and to hear Chancellor Brown read his decrees. Dr. McElhenney was very obliging, and, if we would get our lessons well, he would meet us at an early hour, hear us recite, and let us go to court.

“He was then also preaching stately in several places in two counties. He was a lively and powerful preacher. He was also very tender, especially in preaching funeral sermons, which were then much called for. He was very joyous on wedding occasions, and was often sent for to a great distance to celebrate that honored rite. He always travelled on horseback, and I never heard of his failing to meet any engagement. He was a great rider, was a good judge of a horse, and perhaps never rode a poor traveller. For the last twenty or thirty years of his riding about he carried no watch. He said it misled him if he relied on it; but that his horse, if he would rely on him, always brought him in good season to his appointments.

“When this venerable man went to his only pastorate, there were not more than fifty members of the Presbyterian church within seventy miles of his home in one direction, one hundred and fifty miles in another, and one hundred miles in two others. In the same region they are now counted by the thousand, and two generations of godly people have passed away. He has married more than fifteen hundred couples. He has, perhaps, baptized as many more. He has preached nearly nine thousand times, of which many hundreds were funeral discourses.

“In hospitality he was boundless; in energy, indomitable; in friendships, ardent; in good will to all,

a model. He was known by almost all the children and servants for miles around Lewisburg. In 1858 there was a gathering of his friends at a meeting which lasted several days. It was the semi-centenary of his settlement. Rev. John Brown, of the same county; Rev. S. R. Houston, of Monroe; Rev. Dr. James Brown, of Kanawha, and the writer of this notice, attended. Many people came twenty miles to greet their spiritual father and adviser. One of his ministerial brethren rode on horseback one hundred miles, and one of his former pupils rode seven hundred miles, to greet this good man.

“In stature Dr. McElhenney was above the average height, rather thin than robust, with a musical voice, in which strangers noticed a defect in pronouncing some syllables. He always had a manner of extreme earnestness. Sometimes his tones of voice and whole appearance melted down all his pious hearers. His addresses at the communion table were very solemn and affecting. I heard from him a sermon at Falling Spring Church, in the spring of 1824, I believe, which so affected the late Dr. George A. Baxter, then President of Washington College, that for several days he was heard repeating parts of it as he walked over College Hill.

“As long ago as 1845 a member of the New York press visited this region, and was so struck with the power of this man that he wrote to his paper: ‘Wherever, in the hundred valleys that lie hidden in the mountains of Southwestern Virginia, you shall observe a dwelling, around which reign thrift and neatness, and within which are found domestic happiness and

enlightened piety more than is common, there shall you hear them speak with reverence and affection of this good man, and tell many a story of days spent at school in Greenbrier. Let it be known that he is to preach, and all will be seen moving as when John the Baptist preached in the wilderness of Judea; for even those who at all other times neglect the house of worship, will not neglect it when this earnest veteran officiates. For the space of two hundred miles all around him he is *the* bishop acknowledged by all hearts. . . . No man in Virginia rides and preaches more than he. None but the well-mounted shall be his company for a whole day on one of his preaching tours to the destitute settlements of these mountains.

“ ‘He appears to be ever in a hurry to do good. He has been in a hurry all his life. He has no time for elegant circumlocutions. As soon as his message is delivered, he is in motion again, to deliver his message somewhere else. He is the very personification of motion. He is a striking illustration of how much a man can do who does it with his might.

“ ‘I may add that such a man, in the best sense, never dies. His spirit and principles will live in ten thousand hearts, in successive generations, while a single human voice is heard, or footstep seen, among the mountains of Virginia.’

“This venerable man married, early in life, the daughter of Arthur Walkup. This excellent lady survives him. Three of his children and a large number of grandchildren are still living. Before Dr. McElhenney’s strength failed, his church secured the services of a co-pastor—first, Rev. J. Calvin Barr, and

more recently, Rev. Matthew Lyle Lacy. In 1858 the Baltimore Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church met in Lewisburg, and showed him great respect, as he showed them great affection.

“But he is gone to his reward, and we are left to admire the grace given him, and to try to follow him as he followed Christ. God bless all his loved ones.

“COLUMBIA, SOUTH CAROLINA, *January 5, 1871.*”

[FROM *The Christian Observer of January 18, 1871.*

“DEATH OF REV. JOHN McELHENNEY, D. D.

“*The Staunton Spectator* gives the following particulars concerning the death of this venerable father, which was briefly mentioned in our last :

“‘This venerable and distinguished minister of the Presbyterian Church died at his residence in Lewisburg, Greenbrier county, West Virginia, about 10 o’clock on the morning of Monday, the 2d of January, 1871. Having folded his arms across his bosom, he peacefully fell asleep on earth, to awake in the blissful home of the blessed in heaven. He was a faithful soldier of the cross, who put on the whole armor of God, and who was engaged for the long period of more than sixty-two years in fighting the “good fight,” during which time he “kept the faith” “without variableness or shadow of turning”; and none doubt that he is now wearing the “crown of righteousness” conferred upon him by “the Lord, the righteous Judge.”

“‘Though dead, yet still he lives; for the great Captain of Salvation has given the comforting assur-