

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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until she died, which was on the ninth day. She was brought on and buried at the old place.

“Our family matters move on in their usual way, except a great scarcity of corn. I have had to buy more this year than I have had to do, put it all together, since I have been farming, and at this time it is very difficult to get any.

“I am very much pleased that Henry and Liza are striving to get a Bible apiece for saying their catechism, and hope they will succeed. I am also much pleased that all the little children are learning their lessons like good children. You must present my love to Mr. Fry, Susan, and all the children; and to Washington, Martha, and all the children.

“Your affectionate father,

“JOHN McELHENNEY.

“N. B.—I have just returned from marrying D. Lewis and E. Reynolds.”

The next letter proves that his fears have been confirmed. It is addressed to his daughter-in-law, immediately after her husband's death. In it he lays aside his own grief as a father, to console her greater loss.

“LEWISBURG, *April 15, 1853.*

“MY DEAR DAUGHTER:—By last evening's mail, through Doctor Weed's kind letter, we received the truly melancholy news of the Doctor's death. This is, indeed, a most sad and painful affliction on us all, but more especially on you and your dear children. If the deep, heart-felt sympathy of his parents and all your friends could give you relief, you would be sustained under your awful trial. But whilst this is not

without its effect, it will be far from reaching your case. But there is a source from whence you may obtain comfort and support, as far as the nature of the case will admit. You know that I allude to the comforts of religion, through the promises of God's word. It is true that these are exceeding great and precious promises, and they are especially so when applied to your case. You are deeply afflicted. Hear the promise: 'All your afflictions shall only work out for you a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory'; and although 'many are the afflictions of the righteous, yet the Lord delivereth them out of them all.' You have lost your husband, and your dear children their father; but God has promised 'that he will be a father to the fatherless, and a husband to the widow.' I know that, however precious these promises are, and however applicable they are to your case, yet it is exceedingly difficult to apply them so as to receive that comfort which they are calculated to give. Indeed, nothing but divine grace applying them can effect this, which I pray God he may grant you.

"But there is another source of consolation in your case, which ought to give you great comfort, and that is, although you have lost your dear companion, yet, I trust, not before he was prepared for the change; and if so, then, on the authority of God's word, he is not only removed far beyond all pain and suffering, but put in full possession of perfect and eternal happiness: a thought well calculated to heal even the deepest wound made through his death; a thought which ought to fill us all with the deepest gratitude to God, that what has been our loss is his gain.

“I have been much afraid that the unremitting 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.