

CENTENNIAL BIOGRAPHY.

MEN OF MARK

OF

CUMBERLAND VALLEY, PA.

1776—1876.

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REV. JOHN H. KENNEDY.



REV. JOHN H. KENNEDY was descended from a very respectable and pious ancestry. James Kennedy, his grandfather, emigrated from Ireland, and settled first in New Jersey, and afterwards in Pequea, Lancaster county, Pa., where some of the family still reside. Rev. Robert Kennedy, the father of the subject of this sketch, who is elsewhere noticed in this volume, was for many years in the ministry, and sustained a very high standing among his brethren for talents, learning and respectability.

John Herron, Esq., the maternal grandfather, who was the father of Francis Herron, D. D., lived and died on "Herron's Branch," Franklin county. At the house of this venerated grandfather, John H. Kennedy was born, November 11th, 1801. His mother (Jane Herron) was, in the mysterious providence of God, removed by death when John, her eldest son, was eighteen months old. After the death of his mother, he lived in his grandfather's family until his fifth year. During this period his health was very delicate, and little hope was entertained that he should attain to manhood. His recollections of his grandfather, and his residence in his family, were of the most pleasing kind. It was, he remarks, his "Vale of Tempe," and the time spent there, his "Saturnalia." About the close of his fifth year he was taken home by his father, who had married a second wife. He was early sent to school, but was not so fond of study as of play, and especially such sports as required vigorous exertion. These, though often exposing him to danger, and sometimes to injury, contributed to that remarkable health which he enjoyed until the last year of his life. In his ninth or tenth year, he commenced the Latin grammar with his father, under whose instruction he studied the Latin and Greek Languages. He was afterwards connected with the Academy in Cumberland, Maryland, of which his father, on his removal from Welsh Run, had taken charge, being at the same time pastor of a congregation in that place. In November, 1818, he became a student of Jefferson College, Cannonsburg, Pa. During his whole collegiate course he sustained a high standing as to talents and scholarship, and graduated with honour, May, 1820.

Mr. Kennedy spent the summer of 1820 at his father's, in general reading, and in efforts to do good, as he had opportunity. In October

of that year he entered the Theological Seminary at Princeton, where he studied the regular term of three years. To this period he always reverted with endearing recollections. He commenced his theological studies with diligence and success, and was soon distinguished by his talents and acquirements. During the fall vacation of 1821, he was taken under the care of the Presbytery of Carlisle. During the winter or spring of this year, he visited Morristown, New Jersey, at the request of Mr. McDowell, pastor of the church there, a powerful revival of religion having commenced, which pervaded the whole country. In October, 1822, he was licensed to preach the Gospel—aged twenty years and ten months. Deeply impressed with the responsibilities of the work to which he was to be devoted, he set apart a day for fasting and prayer, a duty which he often practised in the succeeding years of his life. After his licensure to preach the Gospel, he continued his studies another year at Princeton. During this year, the doctrines denominated Hopkinsian were frequently the subject of warm discussions in the Seminary. In these discussions he took an active and decided part in opposition to what he believed erroneous in these doctrines. A debate prepared at that time on the subject of the atonement, was afterwards published in the first volume of the *Christian Advocate*. Its admission into that periodical by the venerable editor, Dr. Green, is no slight evidence of its intrinsic ability and excellence, though written by one who had just arrived at the years of manhood.

Leaving the Seminary in the fall of 1823, Mr. Kennedy itinerated in different directions about eighteen months. He preached for some time in Bedford and Uniontown, Pa., and traveled through some of the Western States. He traveled also to the South, and preached for some time at Wilmington and Fayetteville, North Carolina. In April, 1825, he again arrived at his father's, who had now returned to his former residence in Fränklin county. In the summer he visited Philadelphia, preached in the Sixth Church as a supply for three months, received a call from that congregation, and was ordained and installed as their pastor, November, 1825, in the twenty-fourth year of his age.

Previously to his settlement in this church he had been appointed chaplain, to go out in the *Brandywine*, the Government vessel, appointed to carry *Lafayette* back to his native land. This appointment was by some means prevented from reaching him until after his installation. Had he received it sooner it might have given a new direction to the current of his life.

His settlement in Philadelphia was unsought, as it was unexpected, by himself. The station was one of great importance and responsi-

bility, for so young a man. The Sixth Church grew out of a division of the Old Pine Street Church, of which Dr. Alexander had been pastor when called to Princeton. On the settlement of Dr. Ely this division took place, and the Sixth Church was formed. It contained a large portion of intelligence, piety and respectability, but its location in the vicinity of other churches, and certain pecuniary embarrassments, were unfavourable to its growth. It had become vacant by the resignation of Dr. Neill, who had accepted a call to the Presidency of Dickinson College. After labouring a year in this congregation, and discouraged at his prospect of usefulness, he determined to resign his charge. The Presbytery met, and with the concurrent desire of the congregation, persuaded him to remain. His intention was at this time to have gone to Liberia, and he often expressed his regret that he yielded to the advice to remain in Philadelphia, having then, as he remarked, "had a burning zeal in behalf of Africa, such as he never felt in behalf of any other object." In 1828, he was married to Miss Harriet McCalmont, of Philadelphia, whose intelligence, piety, and accomplished education, qualified her eminently for being to him a prudent counsellor and cheering companion. In December, 1829, at his own request, his connection with the Sixth Church, which had continued for four years, was dissolved. During this period he discharged the duties of his office with ability and faithfulness. The *visible* fruits of his ministry were not equal to his *desires*, and hence his frequent discouragements, which resulted in his resignation, yet his labours were blessed to the edification of Christians, and a *goodly* number added to the Church. The charge of a congregation in a city is one of great responsibility and hazard, especially to a young man, yet was Mr. Kennedy enabled to sustain a high and increasing reputation among his brethren, and the intelligent part of the religious community, as an able, lucid, and instructive preacher of the Gospel. It is known that he stood very high in the estimation of his venerable patron and friend, Dr. Green, who occupied a pew in his church, and sat with delight under the ministry of his young friend.

After Mr. Kennedy's connection with his congregation was dissolved he committed himself to the providence of God, without any definite object or plan as to future settlement. He was urged to make a tour to Missouri, with a view of settlement at St. Charles, and accordingly left Philadelphia with that intention. The severity of the season prevented him, and he was detained in Franklin county. A call was prepared for him from the congregation of Newville, one of the largest and wealthiest in Carlisle Presbytery. At this crisis, being uncertain

and anxious as to the path of duty, he set apart, as was his frequent custom, a day of fasting and prayer, to seek Divine direction. It was the 11th of March, 1830. It is worthy of observation that on the evening of this same day, altogether unexpected to him, he received a letter from Cannonsburg, inquiring as to his views in relation to a Professorship in Jefferson College, in connection with the charge of a small congregation, about five miles distant from that town.

He was at first startled at the proposal of a Professorship of Mathematics, for which he considered himself less qualified than for any other department. On further consideration, with the hope that by diligent exertion he might be prepared for the service, he inclined to accept. He visited the place in May; received and accepted the appointment from the college, and the call from the congregation of Centre. He returned to Philadelphia, and arrived in Cannonsburg with his family, and entered on the duties of his profession, June, 1830.

Professor Miller, in view of whose resignation, on account of age, the appointment was made, still continued to officiate for some time. This afforded opportunity for Mr. Kennedy gradually to prepare himself for conducting the departments of Natural Philosophy and Mathematics, which he was enabled to do with great credit to himself, and to the entire satisfaction of all concerned. After the division of the departments of Natural Science and Mathematics, and the appointment of a distinct Professor for the latter, he devoted himself more exclusively to Natural Philosophy and Chemistry, in which he greatly excelled.

In a sermon on the death of Professor Kennedy, preached in the College Chapel, by the Rev. Matthew Brown, D. D., President of the institution, December 27th, 1840, he says:

“As an *instructor*, Mr. Kennedy was thorough, discriminating, accurate and lucid in his illustrations. As a member of the Faculty he was energetic, fearless, and always ready to share the responsibility of a disciplined government. As a *preacher*, he was *instructive*, solemn, searching and forcible. As a *pastor* he was laborious and faithful. As a *writer* he was characteristically lucid, simple and concise. “*Multum in parvo*,” appeared to be his motto in all his productions. He wrote with great facility, and furnished for “the periodicals,” a number of essays, which do him great credit. His *talents* were various, and in some respects of a high order. He had more of the *intellectual* than the *æsthetic*—more of argumentation than poetry in his composition—more of the instructive than the pathetic.

He was a man of great *benevolence* and *liberality*. This feature of

his character was not generally understood. In his wordly transactions he was exact, but when proper objects of benevolence were presented, no man in the community in which he lived was more liberal, according to his means. Besides the public contributions, in which he was always among the first, he performed many acts of private liberality unknown to the world.

Considered as a *Christian*, "the highest style of man," his *soul-searching* experience, his conscientiousness and stern integrity, his self-denial, his steadfast faith on the righteousness of Christ, his abhorrence of sin, his desires and endeavours after holiness, and his habitual aim to glorify God, gave "lucid proof" of sincere piety while he lived, which was confirmed in his death.

His health began seriously to decline in the winter of 1839-40. A journey to the east during the summer proved unprofitable, and he returned home to die in the bosom of his family. He looked forward to the hour of his death without dread. Still he clung to life, and although with regard to himself he had no fears, and could say, "to be with Christ is better," yet when he looked around on his wife and little children, and the prospect of leaving them exposed and unprotected in such a world as this, he greatly desired to live. At length, however, he was enabled, with sweet acquiescence, to commit the precious charge to Him who said, "Leave thy fatherless children, I will preserve them, and let thy widows trust in me."

His old enemy did not fail to assail him in his weak state, and when near the close of life, with *doubts* as to the foundation of his hope. These, however, were soon dispelled, and he afterwards enjoyed uninterrupted calmness to the last. A few days before his release he spoke of his departure with great composure and confidence. When the weather permitted, he was usually taken out in a carriage. On returning, a day or two before his death, he said that *that* was his last ride; in his next remove he "would be carried by angels into Abraham's bosom." On the 15th of December, in the thirty-ninth year of his age, he died without a struggle, and "sweetly fell asleep in Jesus." His wife and two children yet survive. One of them, the Rev. Robert P. Kennedy, is Pastor of the Red Clay Presbyterian Church, near Brandywine Springs, Delaware. With him his mother and sister reside.