

CENTENNIAL BIOGRAPHY.

MEN OF MARK

OF

CUMBERLAND VALLEY, PA.

1776—1876.

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REV. ROBERT KENNEDY.



THE REV. ROBERT KENNEDY was born in Lancaster county, Pennsylvania, on the 4th of July, 1778. His grandfather, William Kennedy, with his brother Robert, emigrated from Ireland to this country in 1730, and settled in Bucks county, Pennsylvania. Robert had a son, William, who was a Major in the Revolutionary Army, and was killed by the Tories near the commencement of the war. Some members of that branch of the family continued to reside in the Northern Liberties of Philadelphia up to 1836. William Kennedy, the brother of Robert, and grandfather of the subject of this memoir, had four sons—Thomas, James, Robert and John—and three daughters. James, the second son, was married in 1761 to Jane Maxwell, daughter of John Maxwell, and sister of General Maxwell of Revolutionary memory. They had twelve children, of whom Robert, afterwards the Rev. Robert Kennedy, was the ninth.

Of the early history of young Kennedy, the writer has no further information than that he received his elementary and classical education under the direction of a Mr. Grier, probably the Rev. Nathan Grier, pastor of the Presbyterian Church of Brandywine Manor, Chester county, Pa., and that tradition reports him to have been a youth of steady habits. He made a profession of religion in the church at Pequea, in his native county, but at what time is not known. His collegiate education was received at Dickinson College, Carlisle, where he graduated, September 20th, 1797, as the Rev. Dr. McGinley says; "the best scholar in his class." He studied theology with the Rev. Nathanael Sample, then pastor of the congregations of Lancaster and Middle Octorara. It was customary for young gentlemen looking to the ministry at that time, thus to prepare for their chosen work under private instruction, as Theological Seminaries had not then come into existence. And it may not be questioned that much as this method of preparation lacked the variety of modern facilities, it had some peculiar advantages. Being in due time introduced to the Presbytery of New Castle by Mr. Sample, Mr. Kennedy was taken under their care as a candidate for the Gospel ministry on the 12th of June, 1798, and on the 20th of August, 1799, he was licensed at Upper Octorara to preach the

gospel. At the request of the church of that place, he was appointed by the Presbytery to supply them half of the time for six months. At the close of this time, by the leave of Presbytery, he traveled without their bounds, and spent the greater part of the time in supplying vacant churches in the Presbytery of Carlisle.

On the 30th of September, 1800, Mr. Kennedy was dismissed by the Presbytery of New Castle to put himself under the care of the Presbytery of Carlisle, and was received by this latter Presbytery on the 7th of October, 1800. On the 9th of September, 1802, a call was put into his hands from the united congregations of East and Lower West Conococheague, known as Green Castle and Welsh Run,* which call he accepted; and, on the 13th of August, 1803, the ecclesiastical banns having been published according to the custom of the time,† he was ordained to the office of the holy ministry, and installed the pastor of said churches. In these churches he continued to labour until the 9th of April, 1816, when, at his request, the pastoral relation between him and them was dissolved. His action in relation to this matter was believed by many to have been too hasty, as the circumstances were altogether insufficient to authorize so important a step. A very fulsome obituary notice of a young man of the congregation, who had been an officer in the army during the war which had just closed, had been published in some of the papers in that vicinity. Mr. Kennedy entertained a high regard for the character of the young man, but thought the production in very bad taste. Some one was so unfortunate as to misunderstand his views, and represented the matter to the family of the deceased in such a manner as to wound their feelings. Some remarks, also, which he made from the pulpit on a day of especial observance, were interpreted by prejudiced politicians as having a party aspect, and these things were caught up and repeated by the gossiping members of his church, in every circle in which they moved. Mr. Kennedy hearing them, and being of a sensitive nature, without con-

* See Historical Sketch.

† The call in which there is pledged "the sum of one hundred and thirty-three pounds, six shillings and eight pence yearly," is signed by James Mitchell, Alexander Gordon, Robert Marshall, Thomas Johnston, Thomas Mason, David Denwiddie, James Wilson, Joseph Davison, George Brown, Andrew Denison, James Downey, Sr., Nathaniel Martin, Thomas Waddell, Archibald Rankin, James Poe, William Bleakney, John Kennedy, William Scott, David Rankin, James Moore, John Lawrence, John Hargrave, Andrew Robinson, James Patton, John Edmiston, Isaac Far, Elias Davison, James McCleno, James Watson, Edward Wishard, Thomas Wallace, Robert Robinson, John M. Davison, James Johnston, Abraham Smith, William Allison, James McLenahan, Jr., John Johnston, John John, Hugh McKee, James Downey, Jr., Robert Davison, John Watson, Thomas Brown, Robert Crunkilton, John McClary, Peter Shields, James McCrea, Alexander McCutchen, Samuel McCutchen, Samuel Crunkilton, Samuel McCutchen, Patrick Long, Nathan McDowall. The lineal descendants of the signers of this document may be found in nearly every state south and west of this point, many of them occupying positions of responsibility and honour.

sulting any of his friends, announced to his congregation, after preaching on the Sabbath, that he would apply to the Presbytery, at its next meeting, for a dissolution of his pastoral relation to his congregation. By the persuasion of his friends, however, when the matter became known, the application was either not made to the Presbytery, or, if made, was withdrawn. But he made an application to the Presbytery, at their meeting on the 9th of April, 1816, and his pastoral relation was dissolved.

“From the beginning of Mr. Kennedy’s ministry,” says the Rev. J. W. Wightman,* “the congregation seems to have been in a prosperous condition. The dangers of the frontier had been removed. The settlement was at rest and the population was increasing. And as a consequence, the congregation under the efficient ministry of Mr. Kennedy was speedily so strengthened in numbers, that to provide room for them, it became necessary to enlarge the church.” Mr. Wightman also says, in referring to a classical school which, at that time, was conducted in the old “Study House” by a Mr. Boreland:—“This school was tenderly cared for by Mr. Kennedy, who was a man of sound and thorough scholarship, and who used his influence through his whole life to have young men equip themselves well for any good work.”

During the month of May, 1816, Mr. Kennedy removed with his family to Cumberland, Maryland, where he had been invited to preach to a small church, and take the charge of the Academy. Upon his arrival there, he delivered an address before the Board of Trustees of the Academy, which was so favourably received that a copy of it was requested by them for publication. His geographical position, at the extreme western border of the Presbytery, cut off from intercourse with his ministerial brethren, left him to act alone, without the counsel or sympathy of those with whom he had been accustomed to consult and act. His situation was calculated to produce discouragement, and at one time induced him to project the organization of a new Presbytery.

In the midst of the loneliness of his position, however, he was not left without some token of the Divine favour. In 1820 his church and the town were visited with a precious revival of religion, during which a goodly number became subjects of Divine grace. But the next year, movements of a different character made their appearance. Theatrical exhibitions were introduced into the town by the young men of the place, to the great detriment of religion. Articles in their favour were written and published in the papers of the town. Mr. Kennedy fur-

* Historical Discourse delivered in Presbyterian Church of Green Castle, Pennsylvania, May 9th, 1869.

nished anonymous articles in reply, and so scorching was one of them, that the name of the author was demanded, with threats of punishment when he should be discovered. The name was given with his consent, but although it created great excitement they did not carry their threats into effect. Mr. Kennedy firmly maintained his ground, in which, to their honour be it recorded, he was sustained by the pious Methodists and Lutherans of the town.

Finding that his salary from the church and the proceeds from the school were not enough to support his family and keep his son, John H., at the Theological Seminary at Princeton, he concluded to return to his former residence on a farm, within the bounds of the congregation of Welsh Run, which he did in the Spring of 1825. The church at Welsh Run being vacant—Green Castle having secured the whole of the labours of a pastor—Mr. Kennedy preached to them as a stated supply, giving part of his time to the congregation at McConnelstown. He continued in charge of these two churches until 1833, when his labours were divided between the Welsh Run church and some of the small towns in the neighbourhood. As none of these congregations could afford to give him much of a salary, he supported his family by his own exertions on a farm. He was one of the first advocates of temperance in Franklin county. He never would sell any of his grain to distillers. And in order to show that the farmers were in error, in supposing that they could dispose of their small grains profitably only by converting them into whiskey, he purchased cattle and hogs and fattened them with such grains and products of the farm as would not bear the expense of transportation to the distant railroad market. He also established the habit of cutting harvest without the use of liquor, against great opposition, both from the labourers and the farmers. At first it appeared as if he would lose his whole crop, on which his family depended, but he shouldered his cradle himself, assisted only by a hired lad of sixteen years, his little son of twelve, and a bound boy of eleven. After the first day, his daughter begged that she might be allowed to assist her father. This little party toiled on from day to day in the hot sun, without making much headway, until after the neighbours had cut their harvests, when they nobly came to his assistance, with their hands, and cut the whole of the remainder of his crop in one day. After the first year or two, he had no difficulty in getting as many hands as he required, and now no person in that neighbourhood thinks of taking liquor to the harvest-field.

Mr. Kennedy was twice married. His first wife, to whom he was united February 17th, 1801, was Jane Herron, sister of Rev. Dr.

Herron, formerly pastor of the First Presbyterian Church, Pittsburgh, Pa. She died May 31st, 1803. By her he had two sons, one of whom John H. Kennedy, became a minister in the Presbyterian Church.* He was married a second time, the 5th of June, 1806, to Mary Davidson, daughter of Elias Davidson, of Franklin county, Pa., by whom he had ten children, all of whom, but one son, are now dead. James Maxwell Kennedy, who married Sibilla S. Morris, daughter of Evan Morris, of Chester Co., Pa., and who was a gentleman of fine personal appearance, elegant and accomplished manners, and popular and distinguished as a dry goods merchant, died in Philadelphia, March 9th, 1848, leaving two children, Herbert Morris Kennedy and Amelia Theresa Kennedy. Elias Davidson Kennedy, the only survivor of the family, resides in the same city, and, as the reference made to him in the "Historical Sketch," in connection with the "Robert Kennedy Memorial Church," indicates, has shown a grateful appreciation of his deceased father's memory. His wife is a great grand-daughter of Matthew Shields, of St. Thomas, Franklin county, Pa., a gentleman belonging to a very respectable Presbyterian family, whose daughter Agnes, married William Clarke, of Cannonsburg, son of Thomas Clarke, of Chadsford, on the Brandywine creek, and whose oldest son, Thomas Shields Clarke, born at Cannonsburg, January 18th, 1801, after a very active and industrious life, particularly distinguishing himself in the transportation business, died at Pittsburgh, October 19th, 1867, leaving two children, Charles J. Clarke, and Mrs. Agnes Shields Kennedy, wife of Elias D. Kennedy.

In stature the Rev. Robert Kennedy was of medium size, slender, and of fair complexion, blue eyes, and very near-sighted. He was industrious, plain and unostentatious in all his habits. He was a man of vigorous intellect, and a fine scholar, especially in classical literature. He took a great interest in the success of Marshall College, which the following note will show was appreciated :

"GOETHEAN HALL, *May 9th*, 1836.

"REV. ROBERT KENNEDY.

"*Respected Sir* :—

"You are, without doubt, aware that a custom generally obtains amongst literary societies, of electing as honorary members, such persons as are distinguished for their literary taste and attainments. In accordance with this custom the 'Goethean Literary Society of Marshall College,' located at Mercersburg, Franklin county, Pa., entertaining a high opinion of your character as a gentleman, and duly appreciating your taste for literature and your devotedness to this cause, has taken the liberty to enrol your name

*See his sketch in another part of the volume.

on the list of her honorary members, and instructed the undersigned committee to communicate intelligence of this transaction. We are aware, that it is only by securing the influence and co-operation of such individuals as yourself, that we can give character and stability to our society, and whilst it affords us pleasure to be her organs on the present occasion, and whilst we are sensible the society has no other claims than such as are based upon your general devotion to the interests of literature, we trust that you will not only pardon the liberty she has taken, but willingly accept of her small token of respect.

“Wishing you health, prosperity and continued success in your literary pursuits, we have the honour to be, respected sir,

“Yours, respectfully,

“H. J. BROWN,
A. H. KREMER, } *Committee of the G. L. Society.*”
M. KIEFFER,

As a preacher Mr. Kennedy stood high in a Presbytery in which he had as compeers some of the ablest men in the Presbyterian Church. “His sermons,” says Dr. Elliott, “were full of solid evangelical matter, well arranged, and forcibly expressed, were written in full, committed to memory, and delivered without notes. His style was earnest and persuasive, and he rarely failed to secure the fixed and sustained attention of his audience.” The Rev. A. A. McGinley, D. D., another of Mr. Kennedy’s co-presbyters for many years, says: “As a preacher he had few superiors. The plan of his discourses was as clear as the sun. He could pour a flood of light on almost every subject he discussed, and there was much pleasure and profit in attending to his sermons. They were always orthodox, always to the point, always instructive, and frequently very impressive.” The following concluding sentences from a sermon on the Sacrament of the Lord’s Supper, preached by Mr. Kennedy, at Welsh Run, and since published, will serve to show the fidelity and earnestness with which in the pulpit he urged men to the performance of their duty:

“I have now endeavoured to state the case in a plain and serious manner. What resolutions, my brethren, have you formed? Or what line of conduct do you intend to pursue? Are the arguments which have been mentioned, sufficient to convince you that you ought to do this in remembrance of Christ? And are you resolved by the grace of God, that you will not be disobedient to the heavenly command? Or are you determined to pay no attention to these things, and to treat them with contempt? You probably think that you are the sons of liberty and the lords of reason, and look down with scorn upon the bigotry and superstition of the religious part of mankind. But sober reason, in my opinion, blushes at your conduct, and clearly points to

religion as its greatest perfection and brightest ornament. You may, indeed, live without religion, and perhaps even be happy, but if you should die without it, I shudder with horror to conceive the consequences. True religion is the friend of sober reason, and the man who chooses them as his guide and comforter, shall be happy in time and through eternity, but he that sinneth against Christ, who is the wisdom of God, wrongeth his own soul, and all that hate Him love damnation.

“Do any of you resolve, my brethren, that you will attend upon this ordinance, but decide to defer it to some future period? However foolish and unreasonable the excuse, it is so common and so often repeated, that I can scarcely think of any reply that will be likely to strike your attention. If the prison of hell were unveiled to your view, it would discover thousands who have made the same excuse, and who are now bound in everlasting chains of darkness and misery. If you are unfit for communion with God and his saints in this world, you must be unprepared to die, and unworthy of heaven. And surely, this is not a situation in which you may content yourselves, to live year after year. The table of the Lord we expect will shortly be spread in this house, and elsewhere for our brethren of different persuasions. We are sent to invite you to the Marriage Supper of the Lamb. Lay aside, we beseech you, your pitiful excuses. Make yourselves ready for the feast. And may the Spirit of the living God enable you to come to it in a worthy and reverential manner.”

Not only was Mr. Kennedy, as already stated, a fine classic scholar, but, says the late Dr. Duffield, of Detroit, “he was also a man of real humour, keen wit, and not a little drollery. His sarcasm was delicate, pointed and always made a clear cut, like a sharp, smooth, highly sharpened razor.” Living as he did during those times in which the whole Presbyterian Church was so deeply agitated with the schism which culminated in the unhappy division of 1837, he was, though quiet, modest and reserved, and generally disposed to eschew petty strifes ecclesiastical, brought into the discussions and agitations of that time. At the meeting of the Synod of Philadelphia, at Gettysburg, in 1834, the subject of the approval of the “Act and Testimony” coming under consideration, he delivered a speech which was so much admired, that he was urged to let it appear in the *Philadelphian*, then edited by Dr. Ely, and finally consented to its publication. The subjoined extract from the introductory portion of the speech, will show the peculiar character of his mind:

“With becoming deference to the General Assembly, let us examine whether the high charges contained in the Act and Testimony are just

or not. It charges the Assembly with countenancing and sustaining *alarming errors*—yes, *alarming errors*. Now, sir, this Madam Alarm is as insidious an enemy as ever lived on the earth. You know how she deceived Demosthenes. At the battle of Cheronea, when Madam Alarm was driving him in full flight through the woods, his coat caught upon a thorn bush, and supposing it to be a Macedonian soldier he cried aloud to spare his life.

“From this it appears that the wisest and even the bravest of men are not entirely secure from the delusions of Madam Alarm. But some men are much more liable to her impositions than others, and these are sometimes men of a high degree of refinement and integrity. Some of our city clergy who have more study than exercise, have such a nervous sensitiveness, that the slightest touch seems to go to their hearts. Now, when the edge of controversy is brought to operate upon their nervous system in such a state of excitability, it immediately throws them into the *horrors*. While in this unhappy condition, mere straws become stumbling blocks, and a bramble bush or even a shadow, seen through the fog of their gloomy imaginations, appears like hydras, and gorgons, and chimeras dire. And when the pinions of these unfortunate brethren are once erected, it is impossible to smooth them down, either by the exercise of their own reason, or by the assurances of others. Every attempt to calm their troubled spirits only increases the fever of their alarm. It matters not how good, and wise, and judicious they may be on other occasions, their alarm now operates as an inverting lens, which turns every object upside down, and exhibits before them the most frightful monsters. A curious anecdote illustrative of this, is related in Cook’s Voyages. When the crew put in at Tortoise Island to obtain a fresh supply of provisions, one of the sailors got lost, and was missing for several days. When ready to sail, they all set out in search of their lost companion. All day they searched in vain. In the evening they saw a large track in the sand, and being a good deal alarmed, they encamped for the night, kindled fires, and set out guards. About midnight one of the guards fired an alarm, and roused the whole crew, assuring them that he had seen something like a great bear creeping towards the fire. The commander next espied the monster, and fancied it was as large as an elephant, and ordered out a sergeant with his picket to shoot it. But the sergeant was no alarmist. He wished to see what it was before he would shoot it, and he soon perceived that it was a man, and he joyfully recognized their lost companion, who was so famished that he could only crawl on his hands and knees. Had this sergeant been as much alarmed as his captain,

he would have killed his companion; but he was a cold-blooded *fence-man*, and I, who am a fence-man too, beg leave to assure our alarmed brethren, that those whom they conceive to be heretics, are not monsters; they are really men like themselves, their companions in the Gospel ministry, and if they will fire on them and destroy them, they will do an injury to the cause of their Master and to their fellow-creatures which cannot be easily repaired."

"Mr. Kennedy's piety," says Dr. Elliott, "was intelligent and practical; the product of spiritual illumination and sanctifying grace, with great freedom from pretension on his part. It manifested itself in a clear comprehension of the system of Divine truth as revealed in the Word of God, and in a consistent and active obedience to the requirements of duty. Although we have no account of his conversion, or of the inward expression of his heart at this time, we have what is equivalent in a paper found among his manuscripts, bearing date December 8th, 1798, between eight and nine months previous to his licensure. This paper is denominated, 'A solemn dedication of all I have and am to the service of God.' In this solemn act of consecration, signed and sealed by his own hand, there is ample evidence of a deep and earnest exercise of soul, under the saving influences of the Spirit of God."

During Mr. Kennedy's extreme illness, the Rev. Mr. Davie said to him, "Father Kennedy, you have often administered the consolations of religion to others, will you leave to us, who are to stand in your stead, your feelings in dying?" He calmly replied, "I do not experience those rapturous feelings which some have spoken of in dying, but my faith in the efficacy of the blood and atonement of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ is as strong as ever."

Shortly before his death, and after his sight had fled, he requested his wife to call his children around his bedside, and when informed that they were there, he raised his head and said, "My dear children, I am about to leave you; may the blessing of God rest with you through time and eternity;" and in a few minutes thereafter he died.

His death was on October 31st, 1843, of a lingering disease of near a year's standing, caused by a fall, and from exposure to damp when his system was under the influence of medicine.

Thus passed from earth a faithful servant of the Lord, the light of whose example has not been extinguished by his descent to the tomb, but continues to shine with attractive lustre. How great the advantage of having godly parents! "I bless God," said Mr. Flavel, "for a religious, tender father, who often poured out his soul to God for me, and this stock of prayers I esteem above the fairest inheritance

on earth." "A good man leaveth an inheritance to his¹ children's children." "As for man, his days are as grass; as a flower of the field so he flourisheth. For the wind passeth over it, and it is gone; and the place thereof shall know it no more. But the mercy of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting upon them that fear Him, and His righteousness unto children's children, to such as keep His covenant, and to those that remember His commandments to do them."