

May 10, 1856

It is pleasant to look back and see how Providence works to bring about his predestinated designs with reference to us as individuals. For some time my thoughts have reverted to his dealings toward me and mine, and in order that I may have them distinctly before me I will now pen some of them down. In each successive period of my somewhat eventful history, the impression becomes deeper and stronger, that there is -

"A divinity that shapes our ends
Rough hew them as we will."

I was born in Newtonards County Down, Ireland on the 25th of August, 1821, of pious parentage, being the second child. My father was for many years a Ruling Elder in the Irish Seccession Church at Ballyblack, a few miles from the town. My mother's maiden name was Elizabeth Clarke. Her parents, as well as my fathers, were eminently pious, were intelligent and in good circumstances. I was early dedicated to God in infant baptism by my parents and was baptized by Rev. Wm. McCullough. My first school teacher was a Mr. Anthony Grant, a poet. He died early in life and his funeral was the first I ever remember having attended. Then I was sent to an excellent Academy under the supervision and instruction of the late Rev. Wm. Henry, D.D.

At this school I remained until our removal to America. How well do I remember the impressions I received during this formative period of my life at home, in the School, and at the Church. Under God, they all conspired to work out the same happy result, viz, of leading me to Jesus the sinner's friend.

My father moved his family to this country in my boyhood. He was unanimously admitted into the Eldership of the Associate Reformed Church in Lisbon, St. Lawrence County N. York, but never entered upon its active duties owing to his increasing but premature infirmities. The Spring immediately following our arrival in this country he fell a victim to that flattering but fatal disease - consumption. His end was perfect peace; he died in the triumphs of a living, operative faith in the Redeemer, & to this day the distinct impression of his death upon my mind is that his was the death of the righteous.

The summer after our arrival here my youngest brother Washington, an infant, died of teething - the first death, as my father said in the family devotions that night, that occurred in our little social circle. He was buried on a Saturday, & on Sabbath my only sister Elizabeth Magee, took the cholera whilst in church, & was dead before sun-set. This happened in Toronto Upper Canada, where my father first thought of settling. But such was not God's will. The death of my only sister, & my playmate, had a lasting effect upon me. Her last words were "Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy."

After my father's death, brother David - my oldest brother, & the first of six children - & myself were compelled to labour on the farm during the summer.

My winters were generally spent either in reading at home, or in attending the school in our district. I had a strong desire to go on with my education, but the way seemed to be hedged up. There was too something within that seemed to say - you must preach the gospel. Often and often have I during this part of my life gone out into the woods, or in some retired place, & asked God in prayer to be the breaker up of the way going before me.

About this time my oldest brother died of dropsy. Thus one tie after another that bound me to our first American home was sundered: & thus doubtless a kind providence was paving the way for my removal from it.

That winter I was engaged in teaching School, & for three or four successive winters taught an English School not far from my parents. During the summer of 1845 I travelled up to Wisconsin; & whilst there I conceived the notion of writing to my Uncle Smyth of Cincinnati, touching my desire to prepare for the ministry should the way be opened. That notion was put into execution; from a post-office in a small village of Wisconsin I wrote the letter, which was ultimately, the moving cause - humanly speaking - of my coming South & entering upon my classical studies. How distinctly I can now see the finger of God in this & all its attendant circumstances, as well as its subsequent effects. To show how God was thus giving me to the appointed way, it is only necessary here to state that on the arrival of my letter to Uncle Smyth's, he handed it to his son, the Rev. Dr. Thos. Smyth, of Charleston, S. C., who was then visiting him. On reading it, he immediately sat down and replied to it, informing me that students for the ministry could get assistance in various ways to enable them to prosecute their preparatory studies, & instanced the efforts of the Female Education Society of his Church as a case in point. This led to a frequent correspondence between us, which resulted in leaving my Northern home, joining the 2nd Presbyterian Church, Charleston, being taken up by their Society, & in going to Oglethorpe University, Georgia.

In the Spring of 1846 I left home, went to N. York by way of Montreal, Lake Champlain, & the Hudson river. From N. York I sailed on the Ship Sutton for Charleston: tarried there a week or two, & in the summer of that year I reached Oglethorpe, & immediately commenced the Latin Grammar.

I was then 25 years old. My first classical teacher was Mr. R. H. Ramsay, then Rector of the Grammar School of the University. I succeeded pretty well in my studies, & ere that year closed I could read Caesar & the Greek Testament. Next year I became assistant teacher to the Rector in the English department & pursued my studies also. In this way I paid for my board, books, etc. & got along pleasantly. Indeed that was a pleasant year to me. In January 1848 I entered the Sophomore Class, & graduated in 1850. That same evening I started for the Theological Seminary, Columbia S. C. & soon entered upon my pleasant duties there. Three happy years soon rolled away, & in the Spring of 1853 I was licensed to preach the Everlasting Gospel by the Presbytery of Harmony, and immediately after graduation accepted the call to the united churches of Concord & Mt. Olivet, Fairfield District, S.C. was ordained before the meeting of Synod that Fall, & at Anderson C. A. sat for the first time as a member of an ecclesiastical body. In the month of Feb. (22nd) 1854, I was married to Mary Sophie Patterson, spent that Spring and Summer at Liberty Hill, & in the fall moved over to Fairfield among my people, & occupied their parsonage.