

JOHN B. McFERRIN.

A BIOGRAPHY.

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Fifth Thousand.

NASHVILLE, TENN.:
PUBLISHING HOUSE OF THE M. E. CHURCH, SOUTH.
J. D. BARBEE, AGENT.
1888.

A GENEALOGICAL GLANCE.

(To be skipped if you will.)

THE McFerrins emigrated from Ireland to America about 1750. They settled in York County, Pennsylvania. The family connection consisted of three brothers and their young families. The descendants of one of the three removed to the western part of that State. The Rev. Dr. McFerrin, an able and respected minister of the Presbyterian Church, lived for many years near Pittsburgh. William McFerrin, the grandfather of John B. McFerrin, removed to Augusta County, Virginia, in 1765, where he was married to Jane Laughlin. John Laughlin, the father of James, was married to Jane Matthews, and was reared within two miles of Belfast, Ireland. They emigrated to America in 1753, and settled in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania. His son James married a Miss Duncan, and the grandmother of John B. McFerrin was one of their numerous offspring. These Duncans indulged a pardonable pride in a family tradition that they were remotely connected with the once royal family of Scotland. (The most democratic of Americans are seldom indifferent to the fact of having a noble ancestry.)

The Laughlins and Duncans became numerous families, and intermarried with the Singletons, the Kings, the Sharps, the Prices, the Vances, the Berrys, the Youngs, the Porters, and many others.

The Laughlins were noted for their muscular strength and courage. These qualities were highly valued at

that day, and many striking incidents were related concerning these strong and dauntless people. One of these was the grandmother of J. B. McFerrin. She was small of stature, weighing only one hundred and ten pounds, but was a woman of extraordinary bodily strength. She became the mother of nine children, all of whom lived to reach maturity and developed into remarkable physical vigor. Some of this Laughlin family became noted, also, for their intellectual power and culture. There seem to be remarkable exceptions to the law that unusual brain power is to be looked for in connection with a vigorous *physique*, but the law holds good in general. The sound mind is found with the sound body. The human being is a unit, and all its faculties and powers are correlated and interdependent. It is not an unwise or heartless thing to inquire into the physical as well as the moral soundness of the family with which you may become allied by marriage. Passion will not pause to consider this question in most cases, but rushes blindly on to secure its object, leaving future generations to pay the penalty.

Martin McFerrin, who was captured by the Indians when a lad and kept as a prisoner for several years, belonged to a branch of the family that removed from Pennsylvania to Virginia and located near the present site of the town of Fincastle. He was finally rescued, and became a popular and influential man in Virginia, representing his county for many years in the General Assembly. From this branch of the family sprung a numerous posterity, who are scattered through Kentucky, Missouri, and Colorado. To this branch belonged Judge William McFerran, of Glasgow, Kentucky, and his son, the late Gen. McFerran, of the United States army.

(This way of spelling the family name was adopted in accordance with the American custom of naturalizing names, as we do the owners of them in our own way.)

The grandfather of John B. McFerrin at an early age entered the Army of the American Revolution. He was one of the bold and hardy band who, at the battle of King's Mountain, broke the backbone of the British invasion of the Carolinas, and prepared the way for the glorious end of the great struggle for liberty at Yorktown. It was the valor and unflinching fortitude of these men that beat back the heavy onsets of the British regulars, led by the brilliant and ill-fated Ferguson, who fell with his cause on that bloody day. This McFerrin followed the banners of Washington and Greene against the British, and under Col. Christy had also a taste of Indian warfare. When the war ended he married a blooming maiden and settled in Southwestern Virginia, locating a farm on the banks of the beautiful Holston River, about nine miles from the town of Abingdon. The soil was rich and the country new and romantic. He erected a comfortable dwelling in the old solid style, and it is still standing in a good state of preservation, though nearly a hundred years have elapsed since it was built.

Here the father of John B. McFerrin was born, and received the name of his maternal grandfather—James. The nine children, of whom mention has already been made, were all born on this Holston farm. In that new country educational advantages were limited. Families lived so far apart that schools were few, and in most cases the teachers were poorly paid, and of course were not distinguished for scholarship or skill. The pedagogue who could "cipher" as far as the Single Rule of

Three in Daboll's Arithmetic was a prodigy in the eyes of many of his patrons, among whom he boarded around, and by whom he was regarded as half-monitor and half-mendicant. It was a teacher of this type who threatened to flog a pupil for leaving the "t" out of the word "which" in his copy-book! Now and then a man of a different sort would be found in these wilds teaching the children of the pioneers. Educated Irishmen, exiled for political offenses, or self-expatriated from other causes, penetrated into these distant regions and opened schools in which many distinguished men got their first lessons in learning. They were stern and exacting pedagogues. In the corner behind their desks they kept a number of hickory or gum switches—not for ornament, but for use. The frequency and vigor with which they wielded these disciplinary instruments was in many cases made the measure of their popularity with their patrons, who believed in no mild theory of government, human or divine, and with whom obedience to rightful authority was the chiefest of virtues. There was no little tyranny and brutality in some of these schools, but somehow they managed to mold manly men and modest women.

The religious privileges of these Holston pioneers were superior for the times. The family resided near the famous "Green Spring Meeting-house," erected by the Presbyterians, where they had a regular ministry and able preaching. The Bible was their one book, and it gave tone to their thought and shaped their lives. They believed in election and predestination, in a real heaven, and a real hell. They believed in chastity, debt-paying, reciprocal neighborliness, and in standing up manfully for one's opinions and rights. The Church

was the great conservator of the moral life of the community. Their children were baptized and faithfully catechised. Pastors and parents believed what they taught, and thus were able to impress upon the plastic mind of the young that faith in the supernatural, that reverence for sacred things, that sense of accountability to God that gave strength, stability, and dignity of character. The standard of morals was high. If classical scholars were few, grown men and women who were ignorant of the fundamental principles and facts of Christianity were fewer still. The Bible in their homes broadened and sweetened their lives, and was the torch that lighted the march of civilization in its westward course. May its light never be quenched in the homes of their children to the latest generation!

This grandfather was a farmer, and bred all his sons to the same calling; and all his daughters were married to farmers. He was a man of medium size, about five feet ten inches high, weighing about one hundred and sixty pounds. His florid complexion, blue eyes, and auburn hair attested his pedigree. He possessed good common sense, his general reading was considerable, and he was particularly well read in the Holy Scriptures, being a Presbyterian of liberal views. He lived to be ninety years old, and died in the State of Mississippi. William, the second son, was a man of great physical strength. In his old age he became very religious, was licensed to preach, and died in the faith. Burton L., the third son, after living many years in Tennessee, removed to Missouri, where he became an active and prominent member of the Methodist Church. He was roughly treated during the late war, and his son, an excellent young man, was murdered without provocation—one of

the many shocking and inevitable episodes of a conflict in which the political blunders and evil passions of two generations came to their disastrous culmination. Tabitha was married to Burton L. Smith, a devout Christian and an ardent Methodist. Eleanor D. was married to Cullen Curlee, Esq., an excellent man. They became Baptists, and honored their Christian profession by their godly lives. Mary was married to Poston Stovall. She was a beautiful and cultured woman who died in the bloom of young womanhood, leaving a small family.

The father of John B. McFerrin was the first son and second child of his parents. He was born in 1784, and was married on his twentieth birthday to Jane Campbell Berry, who was two years younger than himself. She was the youngest of eight children, the daughter of John Berry and Jane Campbell. The Campbells were an extensive family from Eastern Virginia, and were related to Col. Campbell of King's Mountain celebrity. Jane Campbell Berry was also born on the banks of the Holston River, at a place afterward known as Berry's Iron Works, about three miles from the birthplace of her husband. Her father was connected with a large family, and possessed the remarkable physical strength which was a family characteristic. He was a zealous Presbyterian, and a ruling elder in the Church. His wife's widowhood lasted more than thirty years. She lived to be more than ninety years old, and was at last buried in the same grave with the husband of her youth. She reared eight children, who took respectable positions in society. They were all married; the first-born of each family was a son, and his name John Berry. The Berry family of course became numerous, and are

scattered widely. They may be found in Virginia, Tennessee, Ohio, Missouri, Arkansas, Texas, and California.

Sallie was married to John Gilliland, and became the mother of a large family of sons and daughters. One of her sons, the Rev. Samuel Gilliland, became a useful minister in the Methodist Church, as did also one of her grandsons.

Two great-uncles of John B. McFerrin—James and Andrew—settled at an early day in East Tennessee, near the Virginia line, where they reared large families, some of whose descendants remain in Tennessee, while others removed to the South and West. In Oregon and Illinois are descendants of this branch of the McFerrin family.

A great-aunt married a Martin, from whom sprung the families of the Rev. Thomas Martin and the Rev. Patrick Martin; both were Methodist preachers, and both died in Robertson County, Tennessee.

This genealogical glance shows a prolific, sturdy stock, full of vitality, addicted to fighting, praying, and matrimony.

