

SKETCHES
OF
"VIRGINIA,"
HISTORICAL
AND
BIOGRAPHICAL.

BY THE
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a full toleration, according to the laws of England, and particularly according to the Act of Parliament, commonly called the Act of Toleration."

An address with a like expression of hope and desire, was addressed to Governor Fauquier. Earl Loudon made no reply; Fauquier assured the Presbytery of the protection of the Act of Toleration.

CHAPTER V.

NEW PROVIDENCE.

THE Rev. Samuel Houston, in answer to some inquiries made by the Rev. James Morrison, the third pastor of New Providence, gave in writing the origin of the congregation. He begins with the grants to Beverly and Burden. "The dividing line between their grants crossed the valley near where New Providence church now stands."

"Those families that came first were nearly connected, or large families. For comfort and for safety they generally settled near each other, and with the understanding that as soon as practicable they might have schools for their children; and form religious societies, and have places of public worship. Those first settlers in the valley were mostly Presbyterians; but those in New Providence, I believe wholly so, at least in name. Near the South Mountain, there were several families of the name of Moore,—others of Steel,—near them M'Clung,—and Fulton,—Beard; and then a little further on, my grand-father, John Houston, and his brother-in-law, John Montgomery, and some by the name of Eaken. Near the middle (of the valley), on Kennedy's Creek and its branches were, the Kennedys, Wardlaws, Logans; and another line of Steels, Edmundsons, Buchanans, Pattons, Millars, Stephensons. Towards the North Mountain, on Hays' and Walker's Creek, were two families of Hays, three or four Walkers of the same stock, and their brother-in-law, James Moore; two families of Robinsons, one of Kelly, Hudson, Thompson, Smiley, and two of Rheas. In the midst were three of the Berry family, one of Tedford, one M'Campbell, two or three M'Croskys, and a Coalter family. In the course of a few years, other families came and settled amongst them; their names were, M'Nutt, Weir, Campbell, Wilson, Anderson, Culton, Henry, Lowry, and another stock of Edmundsons, and one family named Todd, my grand-father on my mother's side; two of the name of Stuart, one of Alexander, Cowder, Gray, Jamieson, and two Pattons. Of all these families, by intermarriages other families were soon formed; also others coming in.

“The above settlers commenced, at least many of them, in the woods, and in much fear from the savages and wild beasts. Hence at my grand-father’s house, some distance from the South Mountain, but nearer it than the western side of the settlement, and a house most convenient for the whole settlement to collect their families together in case of an invasion, the settlers erected a stockade fort, the remainders of which, I saw around the yard when I was a boy. Near to the fort, at a place called then, and now, Old Providence, they erected a log meeting-house, and had worship occasionally by supplies from Pennsylvania. In those early days, the population of Timber Ridge united with Providence to get supplies, intending as soon as they could to have a settled pastor between them. The lower settlement on Hays’ Creek and Walker’s Creek, felt themselves too distant from Old Providence, and urged a more central place between the mountains, and proposed the place, now near Witherow’s Mansion. My grand-father prevailed upon his neighbors to meet them at the new site; accordingly a log meeting-house was erected on the southern side of the creek. The united congregations of Timber Ridge and New Providence, called Mr. John Brown, and he was installed their pastor. The first elders were,—a Mr. Millar, Andrew Hays, John Logan, Samuel Buchannan, Alexander Walker, my grand-father John Houston, and Andrew Steel.” After the congregation had agreed upon a site for a new church, having had much difficulty in becoming united in the choice, it was proposed to adopt a name—My aged ancestor said, ‘neighbors we have hitherto had unpleasant and fruitless meetings, to-day we have had an agreeable and successful one, and we are indebted to a kind providence: let us call it New Providence,’ to which all agreed. Then, or soon afterwards they united in efforts; some contributing, others laboring until they finished the stone walls, roof, doors, windows, and floor, and set in benches and a temporary pulpit, and then rested for some years until I was a boy capable of observation. For well do I remember sitting in my father’s seat to see the swallows flying in and out during public worship, to feed their young ones, in nests upon the collar beams and wall-plates, or cavities in the stone work.” When the people after some years finished the work by making a pulpit with a canopy, a gallery, and by glazing the windows, he says—“the elders were—Andrew Hays, John Logan, Alexander Walker, John Houston, my father, Saunders Walker, and soon after James Henry, Charles Campbell, and James M’Campbell.

“About the year 1763 an unhappy difference took place between the pastor, Mr. Brown, and some leading men in Timber Ridge congregation, on account of which Mr. Brown talked of removing. This deeply affected many of the New Providence congregation. But at last they agreed to retain his labors entirely, and on his accepting £80 salary from them alone, his connexion and theirs with Timber Ridge was dissolved. Mr. Brown’s labors were continued harmoniously in New Providence, until his powers of body failed, especially

his voice. Therefore mutually he and the congregation agreed for him to be relieved by the congregation becoming vacant, and another called, all which was in due order effected; and in a short time his successor, Mr. Samuel Brown, was called and installed their pastor, which brings me down to the year 1796.

"A few remarks and I have done. After Mr. J. B. left Timber Ridge many of said congregation retained much affection for him, and through much inconvenience attended almost steadily N. P. meetings and communions as formerly. Another remark is, that before the struggle for independence took place, N. P. kept the Sabbath with great strictness, and family worship was almost universal. Another remark is, that shortly before the war, some men, whose sons were growing up, felt a desire for having them, or part of them, educated liberally, chiefly with a view to the ministry of the gospel. Accordingly a small grammar school was formed in the neighborhood of Old Providence, composed of Samuel Doak, John Montgomery, Archibald Alexander, James Houston, William Tate, Samuel Greenlee, William Wilson, and others, which greatly increased and drew youths from distant neighborhoods. This grammar school was moved to the place near Fairfield, called Mount Pleasant; it was, in 1776, established at Timber Ridge meeting-house, and named Liberty Hall.

"Sincerely yours,

"S. HOUSTON."

Tradition says the first work after building log-cabins for themselves, was to erect a capacious meeting-house. For permanency and dignity they determined it should be of stone. Limestone for mortar could be found in any abundance, but sand was brought on pack-horses six or seven miles from the stream called South Fork. Nails and glass were brought in the same way from Philadelphia. A sycamore, for a long time the only one in the neighborhood, sprung from the bank of refuse sand brought from a stream where the tree abounds. The succeeding generations knew the old sycamore, enjoying its shade on Sabbath noon. So intent were many of the people of New Providence that their house of worship should be properly finished, that they forbore not only luxuries, but what are now esteemed the necessaries of housewifery. One old lady apologized to some company that came to eat with her, for not accommodating more at a time at the table, and requiring them to eat by turns, that all might have the benefit of her few knives and forks, by saying, "We intended to have got a set of knives this year, but the meeting-house was to be finished, and we could not give our share and get the knives, so we put them off for another year." The only pair of wheels in the congregation for many years was made to draw timbers for the church. In their private concerns the drag and sled sufficed.

Of those persons named by Mr. Houston, students of the first grammar school—Doak, Montgomery, Houston, and Wilson be-