

HISTORY
OF
VENANGO COUNTY,
PENNSYLVANIA.

ITS PAST AND PRESENT,

INCLUDING

ITS ABORIGINAL HISTORY; THE FRENCH AND BRITISH OCCUPATION OF THE
COUNTRY; ITS EARLY SETTLEMENT AND SUBSEQUENT GROWTH; A
DESCRIPTION OF ITS HISTORIC AND INTERESTING LOCALITIES; ITS
RICH OIL DEPOSITS AND THEIR DEVELOPMENT; SKETCHES OF
ITS CITIES, BOROUGHS, TOWNSHIPS, AND VILLAGES; NEIGH-
BORHOOD AND FAMILY HISTORY; PORTRAITS AND
BIOGRAPHIES OF PIONEERS AND REPRESENT-
ATIVE CITIZENS; STATISTICS, ETC., ETC.

ILLUSTRATED.

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REVEREND S. J. M. EATON, D. D.—The death of Doctor Eaton, which occurred July 16, 1889, created a profound impression in the community, and it removed one of the oldest, best known, and most prominent men of his calling in the Erie Presbytery. He had been indisposed for several weeks, but his condition was not considered serious. On the afternoon of the day stated, while walking along the street near his residence in Franklin, he was seen to raise his hands suddenly and then fall heavily to the sidewalk. He was carried into his house, but the services of the physicians were of no avail. Death had taken place almost instantly, the immediate cause being heart failure.

Samuel John Mills Eaton was born in Fairview, Erie county, Pennsyl-

vania, April 15, 1820, and hence his useful life had compassed sixty-nine years. He was a son of Reverend Johnston and Eliza (Cannon) Eaton. His ancestors were among the first settlers in Pennsylvania, having lived in the state for over two hundred years. Reverend Johnston Eaton, born in Franklin county, graduated at Jefferson College; he came as a Presbyterian minister in 1805 to Erie county, and preached for some time near the mouth of Walnut creek and in Springfield, and in northeastern Ohio. In the fall of 1805 he went back to his home, where he married, and in 1806 returned with his bride and settled permanently in Fairview township. They came through the dense forest on horseback, with nothing but a rude trail to guide their course. Reverend Johnston Eaton preached the gospel in Erie county continuously up to the year of his death, June 17, 1847, a period of forty-one years. He and his wife were well endowed with the resolute spirit and sterling qualities requisite in the work of the pioneer ministry. On the side of both father and mother the subject of this sketch was descended from that strong blending of the races which he himself on one occasion called "the seed royal of the church of the living God."

In his boyhood he received an academic education at the Erie Academy. In 1842 he entered Jefferson College, where he graduated in 1845. Having studied theology in the Western Theological Seminary, of Allegheny, Pennsylvania, he was licensed by the Presbytery of Erie, on the 16th of March, 1848, to preach the gospel.

On the 16th of April, 1848, Mr. Eaton commenced his ministerial labors in Franklin. February 7, 1849, he was ordained and installed as pastor of that charge, succeeding Reverend Cyrus Dickson, who resigned in March, 1848. His pastorate at first included also the Mt. Pleasant church, to which he gave one-third of his time. He was released from the latter August 29, 1855, thenceforth giving his entire time to Franklin.

Doctor Eaton's ministry here was prosperous. From year to year the church and Sunday school grew in members and interest throughout his long pastorate. When he finally relinquished his pastoral office, the congregation which was so small at the outset of his work had grown to be among the largest and most influential in this part of the state. The little Sunday school had become a small army, and the plain little church edifice had given place to the present beautiful structure, dedicated to the worship of God in 1869. Doctor Eaton's name is rightly inscribed on the cornerstone of that building. Some may see in that edifice a monument of his work; but his more lasting monument is that erected in the hearts of his people, the record of a useful life, interwoven with the life and progress of the community in which he lived.

In 1881 he decided to sever the pastoral relation which had existed for more than a third of a century. In December of that year he tendered his resignation. A large portion of the congregation sought to influence

him into reconsidering the step, but he had definitely made up his mind that it was best, and insisted upon his action as final.

His subsequent career illustrates some of the high qualities of his nature, his unswerving devotion to the duties of his calling, his zeal and willingness to go on while life lasted with the work that his hand found to do. When he vacated the pulpit, which had been the scene of his life's arduous labors and successes, he had reached that age which entitles the veteran to some exemption from the hardships of active service in the field. But he did not yield to the temptation and opportunity to fold his hands and rest. The veteran soldier of the Cross felt that he was enlisted for life. For him there was no discharge in that warfare. For him, also, membership in the army meant active service at the front. So he went right on with the work before him, constantly engaged in writing, preaching at one place and another, and devoting himself in every way to the advancement of Christ's cause and kingdom. There was no change in his Christian bearing, in his solicitude for his people, in his kindness, his courtesy, his friendship, his active interest in the welfare of all who came within the range of his sympathies.

Viewing him as a pastor, those who knew him long cannot speak of Doctor Eaton without esteem and affection. He made it a point to know all with whom his duties, whether religious or social, brought him in contact. He looked after and interested himself in all; but especially in the abode of suffering or affliction was his presence felt. In many a home they remember how he came in their time of trial; how he sat at the bedside of the sick; how he ministered to the dying; how he comforted the bereaved; how he poured out his soul in strong prayer in the final rites of the dead. He was indeed a help and a comforter in affliction. His tender hand not only soothed the sufferer, but it gave substantial help in a thousand ways and places of which the world will never know. It was natural that such a pastor should retain the love and esteem of his people to the last.

Doctor Eaton also retained the friendship of the community at large. His was a character that commanded general respect and confidence. His acquaintances all recognized his unswerving integrity, his high and chivalric sense of honor, his wisdom, his fidelity to duty, his purity of life. While he had some of the stern spirit of the Puritan in religion, he had also the noble faculty of friendship, and by this he was bound to his associates through all the years as with hooks of steel.

No account of Doctor Eaton would be complete without a mention of his scholastic attainments. He was a constant student, and his library of valuable works grew to large proportions. His knowledge of the classics was extensive, and during his pastorate he conducted a number of pupils through a course of the languages. His progress in general standard literature is indicated by the fact that he stood highest of all the army of students in the

Chautauqua Literary and Scientific Circle. As long ago as 1869 he was honored with the degree of Doctor of Divinity by Washington and Jefferson College. In an address before the Jefferson alumni in 1885, Judge W. H. West of Ohio called Doctor Eaton "the Addison of his class and the Irving of his society."

With the cares of an important pastorate on his hands Doctor Eaton found time to do a great amount of exacting literary work. Among the works from his pen published from time to time are: "The History of Petroleum;" "History of the Presbytery of Erie;" "Lakeside," an historical romance; "Ecclesiastical History of Centennial Missionary Work," and a "Biographical History of the Western Theological Seminary." He also wrote the "Memoirs of Reverend Cyrus Dickson, D. D.," an elaborate and worthy tribute to an able man; and in 1876 he delivered a centennial discourse in Franklin, which, in a pamphlet of forty-eight pages, gives a concise history of Venango county from the earliest settlement. He compiled a "Biographical and Historical Catalogue of Washington and Jefferson Colleges," which went to press the day of his death, also left the completed manuscript of a religious work, and a couple of unfinished manuscripts. In addition to these excursive tasks, Doctor Eaton held a responsible position in the presbytery, in which his counsels and assistance were highly valued. He was stated clerk of the Presbytery of Erie for thirty-two years, and of the Synod of Erie for nine years.

As a citizen, Doctor Eaton was not a partisan, but he was a patriot who loved his country, glorying in her past and believing in her future. When the war of the Rebellion arose, his innate patriotism took active shape in word and deed. He lent his best aid toward upholding the Union and strengthening the hands of its defenders in the field. For a time, as a member of the Christian Commission, he was at the front, ministering to the wants of the men in the Army of the Potomac. His love for his country's flag was not a mere sentiment; it was an abiding and reverential affection.

A tour to Europe and the Holy Land, taken in 1871, enabled Doctor Eaton to enlarge his knowledge of Eastern lands by actual observation and research. These resulted in two volumes from his pen, "The Holy City" and "Palestine," which were issued as text-books by the Chautauqua Literary and Scientific Circle. Doctor Eaton's knowledge of Oriental lands and customs secured him a call to the ranks of leading teachers at Chautauqua, and for many years he filled the position at each recurring assembly. Next to Chancellor (Bishop) Vincent he was probably the most prominent man in the work at the assembly grounds, a work with which he had been identified from its inception.

Doctor Eaton's indefatigable industry, his persistent activity, and capacity for labor, were striking characteristics and were at once an example for imitation and a rebuke to the self-indulgent. He was never idle. He

seemed ever mindful of the injunction to work while it is called to-day, ere the night cometh wherein no man can work. The fact that much of his study and his labor in pulpit and lecture room were done while under the discouragements of impaired health, enhances the tribute of praise due him on this score. Through his later years, in which he was called to pass through much bodily suffering, Doctor Eaton kept on with his work. Even up to within a month of his death he was engaged in assisting in the compilation of that portion of this History which deals with the earlier events and residents of this locality. As if with a premonition of some possible interruption, he brought all his energies to bear on the completion of his task. Before the pen had fallen from his fingers that task was finished.

This, one of the concluding services of his life, suggests the reflection that the people of this locality owe a lasting debt of gratitude to Doctor Eaton for what he has done to preserve local history. He was endowed with the historic spirit and gift. He had an aptitude for this line of research, and lost no opportunity to gather all that could be learned from the older generation. He discerned that the charm of local history lies in details. He is really the man who rescued the early history of this county and section of country from oblivion. The traditions were fast fading out. He preserved, unraveled, culled, and collated them. His contributions, as will be seen, make up an important part of this History of Venango County. In writing them he performed a valuable service for the people.

To the virtues that have been recounted may be added the absolute purity of Doctor Eaton's life and conversation. He kept the door of his mouth against all hurtful and improper speech; his self-control withheld him from bursts of temper, and he never wounded the feelings of a fellow man with bitter words. He was a charming man socially, abounding in the "affluence of discursive talk." In his home he was the soul of hospitality. There he was fully assisted by his wife, whom he married in Franklin on the 5th of November, 1850, and who is now living. She was Miss Clara Taylor Howe, daughter of John W. Howe, in his day prominent in politics and at the bar of Venango county.

At the funeral of Doctor Eaton, held Friday, July 19, 1889, a great concourse gathered in the Presbyterian church of Franklin to honor his memory. His brother ministers of the presbytery were present, and in brief remarks depicted his excellence of character, his courtesy, his manliness, his ability, his worth in his calling, the loss which the presbytery and the community had sustained in his death. Reverend James Allison, D. D., editor of the *Presbyterian Banner*, who graduated with Doctor Eaton in the class of 1845, spoke of him as the most loyal of friends; and gazing upon the casket he exclaimed: "Farewell, friend; thou hast ascended to the hill of frankincense and to the mountain of myrrh. Farewell, friend, until the day break and the shadows flee away."

One who was present at that impressive service reflected the thoughts of many when he wrote: "Long will we remember the character and the person who has passed from among us—that strikingly fine presence, the large expressive eyes, the classically regular features; the broad, thoughtful brow, with the abundant locks thrown back from it; the gentle manner, the cordial greeting, the kind words. He has fought a good fight, he has finished his course, he has kept the faith. Not a broken shaft, but a pyramid completed, should mark his resting place. Crown him with the victor's chaplet. Strew his pall and his grave with the flowers he loved so well, types of the immortal amaranth and asphodel and 'pure lilies of eternal peace' which bloom by the river which makes glad the city of God."—*H. M. I.*