

A Beloved Dominie

As north Tama County became more thickly settled, the little church at Tranquillity was outgrown. Neighboring communities wanted their own places of worship. In 1878 the United Presbyterians built a brick church in Traer. Another congregation was formed at Amity. They both drew members from Tranquillity, leaving only about thirty-five in the parent church. The synod decided that it should be closed. But no; these were Scotch people "with a mind o' their ain".

It is recorded in the session book that the Honorable James Wilson made the motion to unite under one pastorate the fields of Tranquillity and Salem, a Presbyterian church six miles west. Tranquillity had to change from the United Presbyterian to the Presbyterian denomination. Mr. Wilson persuaded Dr. Daniel L. Hughes to organize the church in 1879. Peter Wilson induced the old members to join the new association.

Dr. Hughes was a saintly man — like an apostle of old with his smooth-shaven upper lip, long white beard, erect figure, and gentle way. I can remember him yet as he stood among us with his hands outstretched, blessing and exhorting us to

more "pious, happy, and useful lives." Sometimes the halo about his head was almost visible.

Some of our fundamentalist ministers preached so much about sin and punishment that their sermons smelled of brimstone. But Dr. Hughes seldom talked about hell or the devil. He seemed to be the personification of Christlike gentleness. Even at the most casual meeting, he could discuss divine love and our soul's salvation without it seeming in the least inappropriate. Yet there was much strength behind the gentleness.

He was a real home missionary. Coming to Iowa in 1857 when the frontier had scarcely touched the Missouri River, his first work was in the Council Bluffs Presbytery. Later he served in Des Moines. Then he moved to Vinton and entered upon extensive mission work in Benton, Tama, and Black Hawk counties.

In connection with his preaching, he developed a 1200 acre farm; introduced the cultivation of flax; and improved breeds of hogs and cattle, selling at one public sale \$26,000 worth of Shorthorns. He gave a tenth of his income to the church; one month it amounted to \$1000. Before coming to Tranquillity, he had serious losses and decided to give all his attention to the Lord's work. But his experience in cattle breeding made him popular with the farmers of Tranquillity.

From his home in Traer he drove to Tranquility, Baker's Grove, and Salem. Being afflicted with asthma, the frail old man's struggles with the sudden changes of the prairie weather, bad roads, raw winds, storms, and long winters were pathetic. He nearly always mentioned the weather and roads in session and Sunday school reports. To pass the tedious hours on the road, he repeated Psalms from memory.

He often stayed over night at our house on his way to and from Salem. It was something of an occasion when the minister came to visit, at least to the grown-ups. From the children's point of view there was a decided drawback to these visits for he always felt it his duty to test our knowledge of the catechism.

A good many in my day, under the inspiration of Dr. Hughes, committed first the Children's and then the Shorter Catechism and received the presbyterial-fund Bibles and Testaments as a reward. There were always some of us, however, floundering about, lost in the maze of the "benefits", "what is required?", "what is forbidden?", and "the reasons annexed", to the Ten Commandments. It took a lot of theological acumen to grasp the fine distinctions involved. If they had all been as easy and sensible as, "What doth every sin deserve?", we would have done better.

I remember one late afternoon when Dr. Hughes drove into our yard. He had been over at Salem. Mother was in town. Being the eldest, I felt a grave responsibility. This, however, did not trouble me as much as the fear that he might ask me some "questions". Now there were only two I was ever sure of: "What is the chief end of man?" and "The eternal decrees of God".

The minister warmed himself at the stove and talked with the encircling children. Then he turned to me and said, "Now, we'll have to see how you're getting on with your catechism." The world looked black. I was sure to disgrace myself without mother's fortifying presence. The good man cleared his throat and began, "What are the eternal decrees of God?" I reeled off the answer. "Ah, that's fine", he said, and never asked me another question.

Dr. Hughes dissolved his pastoral relations with the church of Tranquillity on October 7, 1885. A year later his wife died. Once as a child I had dinner with father and mother in their home. Mrs. Hughes presided with such grace that I thought she was the most lovely lady I had ever seen. Almost her last act was to send a dollar to the Foreign Missionary Society with the message that it would be her final offering.

Old and in failing health, Dr. Hughes sought

the healing effects of seaside climate at Cape May in New Jersey. "It is simply wonderful how my native sea air restores me", he used to say. He could not humor his asthma long, however. On October 4, 1887, he was dismissed from the Waterloo Presbytery to the Presbytery of Huntingdon, Pennsylvania, where for four years he served as pastor at Petersburg. A short time before his death he published a history of his family: *God's Covenant Fulfilled in Pious Households*.

JANETTE STEVENSON MURRAY