

CHAPTER I

Heritage and Youth

My paternal grandfather was Reynolds Ramsey. It is believed that his parents were Scotch Irish Presbyterians, and that his father on coming to America settled at New-Castle, Delaware. It is a tradition but fully believed by their son Reynolds that on their passage across the Atlantic the mother fell overboard and was drowned. Her body could be seen floating on the sea some time after the accident, being buoyed above the waves by the stuffed or quilted dresses which ladies wore at that early period in the high latitude from which they came. Their son Reynolds was a good English scholar and had been well raised and piously trained. He was tall and graceful. I can even now recollect his polite bearing when yet an old man and especially to ladies. He never entered a room with his hat on and never retired from it without a graceful bow and a modest and sincere adieu. The date of his birth is not here and now known but it can be found in the old family Bible where I have seen it at Robert Swan's Esquire, near Cleveland, Tennessee. Mrs. Swan was his granddaughter and thus came into possession of the family records.

Reynolds Ramsey married Naomi Alexander, daughter of Francis Alexander, on the _____ day of _____ 17____. (These and other similar blanks can be filled by examining Mrs. Swan's Bible.) Her father was a member of influence and position in _____ Church Pa. or New Jersey and his name appears often in the early ecclesiastical records of the presbytery of _____ to which he belonged. His daughter Naomi was a rigid Calvinist and had been well indoctrinated in the creed of the Presbyterian Church. After her marriage she with her husband removed to and settled upon Marsh Creek then in York County Pa. (now Adams County) six or eight miles westward from the present Gettysburg. Thrift followed the industrious and frugal habits of this young couple. He erected a merchant mill upon Marsh Creek and his neighborhood was soon settled by pious and intelligent immigrants. A small village, Miller's Town, soon sprang up in which soon after was organized a Presbyterian Church. Of

this Reverend William Paxton afterwards (1806) was the pastor. The congregation was distinguished rather for its piety and intelligence than for wealth and refinement. Good schools and the living ministry were always well sustained and encouraged. A respect for the laws and order of good society, for parental authority and for filial obedience and a strict regard to the teaching of the Bible and of the protestant religion everywhere prevailed.

In such a community was the rising family of Reynolds and Naomi Ramsey trained. They had three or four sons and one daughter. Of these Francis Alexander Ramsey was probably the eldest and was born May 31, 1764. He was the father of this writer. Early in life he manifested great mental activity and excelled especially in mathematical studies. His chirography was not excellent only, it was elegant. He drew well and was especially skilled in trigonometry and surveying. To these attainments were super-added a gentle and amiable disposition, frank and urbane manners, pure morals and an ambition, well regulated and lofty, to make a mark for himself upon his age and posterity. No theater presented itself for the exhibition of his capacities in the secluded neighborhood where his youth and early manhood had been spent, and he remained, therefore, with his parents only till his nineteenth year.

Of two brothers of his, John and William, nothing further is known, than that they died early, one of them of consumption in Charleston, South Carolina in the house and kind family of Dr. David Ramsay of that city, whose professional aid he had sought under what proved to be an incurable disease.

Another brother, believed to be the youngest son of his parents, Samuel Ramsey received his academic education in his father's neighborhood and finished his collegiate studies at Liberty Hall, afterwards Washington College in Lexington, Virginia under the Presidency of Reverend William Graham. He studied divinity under the same learned divine. After his licensure he missionated in Virginia a short time. Such was his admiration of his great teacher, that he assumed the name of Graham as part of his own and in all after-life was known as S. G. Ramsey. He married the widow of Reverend Carey Allen, Mrs. Elizabeth Christian, daughter of Dr. William Fleming who was surgeon and for a part of the day colonel commandant under General Lewis at the great Indian Battle of the Kanawha, October 1774. He afterwards about 1793 removed to Knox County, now Tennessee, and became the founder and pastor of several

churches in the new county and an approved teacher in Ebenezer Academy, which he established on his own farm. He had hemorrhage of the lungs which terminated in dropsy June or July 1817. An extended memoir of his useful life, his ministerial labors and his educational enterprises was published in 1867-8 in the (Richmond) *Christian Observer* written by this writer under the signature of "Mnemonika" to which the reader is respectfully referred.

The remaining member of the children of Reynolds and Naomi Ramsey was their only daughter, Amelia (Naomi). She married James King who died after the birth of Amelia King and James King. During her widowhood she resided with her parents while they remained in Pennsylvania.

My maternal grandfather was John McKnitt Alexander. His father's name I do not know, but I believe it was James. I think he lived in Hopewell Church in either New Jersey, or Pennsylvania and was a man of position and influence, both in church and state. His wife's maiden name was McKnitt. They had a large family of sons and two daughters. Of the former the names were Hezekiah, John McKnitt, _____, _____, _____, and the youngest Ezekiel. The daughters were Jemima who married James Sharpe, who was a major in the Revolutionary war, and Elizabeth, who married _____ Sample. My grandfather, John McKnitt Alexander married Jane Baine in Pennsylvania and he, his brothers and sisters, were among the first emigrants who from 1740 to 1760 crossed the Yadkin in search of a new home in North Carolina. They founded several Presbyterian churches in what afterwards became Mecklenburg County. Of these, John McKnitt and another brother became elders in the present Hopewell. Major Sharpe and Mr. Sample and their wives were members of the same organization. The name Hopewell was given, it is said, to the infant congregation in fond remembrance of the old church from which they emigrated. In like manner, Hezekiah Alexander became the founder and a ruling elder in Sugar Creek Church. The whole tribe of these Alexanders were remarkable for the tenacity with which they adhered to the doctrines and order of presbytery. They always had a learned clergy, were always the patrons of schools and the institutions of learning, always jealous of their rulers, men of intelligence and public spirit and advocates of the rights of self-government, of conscience and of liberty. Not strange was it, therefore, that when taxation without representation was attempted by the British ministry and enacted by the British parliament, when indeed parliamentary supremacy was

claimed as a part and the essence of the British government, not strange we repeat, was it that the first of the first voice of resistance to the exercise of these arbitrary and unconstitutional powers and exactions, was found to arise from the free, enlightened and virtuous community then starting into life between the Yadkin and Catawba rivers. It was so. That community acted as one man and resolved to separate themselves from the mother country. They elected deputies and invested them with unlimited powers. These assembled at Charlotte on the nineteenth of May 1775, and on the twentieth united in a unanimous Declaration of Independence. Of this convention of deputies, not less than six were named Alexander. Their secretary was John McKnitt Alexander. The whole tribe were active Whigs in the war of the American Revolution which succeeded. My grandfather was beyond the age for military operations and services, yet he was selected by General Greene as a quasi aide de camp, was often pilot of his army and by his influence and his money contributed much to the success of the American arms in the southern states. His eldest son, William Baine Alexander, then below the military age, saw active service during the occupancy of Charlotte by Lord Cornwallis. His (J. McK. A.) three daughters were Peggy Alexander, who was born on the third of April 1766 and Polly, and Abigail Baine. The former was married on the seventh of April 1789, to Francis Alexander Ramsey, who has already been mentioned. The youngest child of John McKnitt Alexander was Joseph McKnitt, who was educated at Princeton, N. J., studied medicine, and settled near the old family mansion of his father, now known as Alexandriana, at the head of Long Creek, on the south side of the Statesville railroad. He had an extensive practice. He married Dovey Winslow. His brother, William B. Alexander, already mentioned, inherited the old homestead and mansion. He married Miss Violet Davidson, and had sons Joseph, Robert D., James McKnitt, John Ramsey, and George W. and _____, and daughters Jane Baine who married John Sharpe then of Tennessee, Peggy who married David Henderson, Rebecca who married _____ McCoy, and _____ who married Dr. Isaac Wilson. . . .

The third daughter of John McKnitt Alexander, Abigail, married Reverend S. C. Caldwell, once pastor of Hopewell and Sugar Creek. They had one daughter Jane Baine and one son Thomas. Jane became the wife of Reverend Walter Smilie Pharr. They had an only child, the present Reverend S. C. Pharr, D.D. Thomas became a Doctor of Medicine, lived near Charlotte. He married a daughter of Honorable _____ John-

son,¹ formerly a member of Congress from the Mecklenburg District. The other daughter of J. McKnitt Alexander, Polly, married Reverend James Wallis, pastor of Providence congregation. They had seven sons, William B. A. John McKnitt A. Ezekiel A., James, Joseph McKnitt, and _____.

The wife of John McKnitt Alexander died in the spring of 1789 a short time before the marriage of her first daughter, Peggy to Colonel Ramsey. The husband never married again, but continued a widower and resided in the old mansion with his son, W. B. Alexander till 1817. He had been exceedingly fond of books, read early and late with intense avidity, and lost his eyesight, and was blind for several years before his death. He lies interred in Hopewell graveyard, surrounded by the remains of his wife and of a numerous posterity. Many incidents in the life of my maternal grandfather, J. McKnitt Alexander are here omitted, as they may be found elsewhere, viz., in Foote's *Sketches of North Carolina Presbyterianism*, under the head of Hopewell, the Charlotte Convention; H. Jones, *Defense of North Carolina*. Wheeler's *North Carolina*, Ramsey's *Annals of Tennessee*, and several articles in the "Land We Love" contributed by this writer.² He was a man of great public spirit and enterprise. Had a vigorous intellect, had most of the attributes of genius, was self-reliant and energetic. Remarkable for probity and for public and private virtue. He was nearly six feet high, very symmetrical in his person, had a fine forehead and the most brilliant black eyes I have ever seen. His manner of speaking was calm and deliberate, but exceedingly earnest and emphatic. With greater culture, his intellect would have equaled that of Calhoun while in the majesty of his virtue and of his unselfish patriotism, he was not a whit behind that most illustrious statesman and esteemed patriot.

This brings to mind what I should have mentioned when speaking of Reynolds Ramsey on a preceding page. During the war of the Revolution he was a soldier and compatriot of Washington. He was at Valley Forge, at Trenton and at Princeton. I have heard him say that it was no exaggeration when the historians of those great events represent that the ice across

¹ Charles Johnson of Chowan County, North Carolina, who served in the Seventh Congress from March 4, 1801 until his death July 23, 1802 is the only North Carolina representative of this name. *Biographical Dictionary of the American Congress 1774-1949* (1950), 1374.

² Cf. Mnemonika [J. G. M. Ramsey], "Sketch of Mecklenburg County," *Land We Love*, 2:129-145 (December, 1866).

Delaware River and the frozen roads the soldiers traveled were marked by the blood from their naked feet. He supplied the Republican army with flour from his mill on Marsh Creek and refused British gold for his breadstuffs, when offered by those he had reason to believe were in the interest of the enemies of his country. I have heard him say that he was as poor in 1781 as at the commencement of the war, and when counting over and examining his box of Continental money left on his hands worthless as waste paper, I have seen his eyes glisten with patriotic joy at the recollection of his sacrifices and self-denial which had made him penniless. That was the price he paid for American liberty and independence.

When his sons had left him and emigrated to the West, my grandfather sold out his mills on Marsh Creek and removed to Gettysburg, now a flourishing inland village. It was laid out by Samuel Gettys, Esquire, who had married his (Ramsey's) sister. He resided in that town several years but still retained his membership in his old church at Miller's Town. Summer, winter, with his wife and daughter, Mrs. King, and her two children he drove out there every Sabbath in his plain old-fashioned carriage and listened to Mr. Paxton, his old minister. He was a devout and attentive worshiper in the house of God, as well as in his own family. I have often heard him mention the names of Davies, Blair, Smith, the Tennants and others of the earlier Presbyterian divines.³ He was a humble, and very pious man, a good citizen, a conscientious public officer, fond of good men and good books. In these he delighted. He reached his three score and ten with few of the infirmities of age. After that period he found it necessary and advisable to comply with the earnest and dutiful request of his two sons in Tennessee to follow them there to spend the evening of life with or near them. This he carried into effect in 1808. There for the present I shall leave him. I intend hereafter on another page to resume his history.

On [an earlier] page of these sheets it has been mentioned that the eldest son of the family Francis A. Ramsey had found in the seclusion of his father's neighborhood, no suitable theater for the exercise of his capacities and his attainments. A brother of his mother, John Alexander, had already removed to and occupied a pleasant farm situated on Big

³ William Tennant (1673-1745), founder of the "Log College" at Neshaminy, Pennsylvania, his sons Gilbert (1703-1763) and William (1705-1777), his pupil Samuel Blair (1712-1751), Blair's pupil Samuel Davies (1723-1761) and Blair's son-in-law Robert Smith were leaders in the evangelical movement in the Presbyterian Church and founders of "New School" Presbyterianism in 1741. Cf. C. H. Maxson, *The Great Awakening in the Middle Colonies* (1920).

Limestone Creek in Washington County of North Carolina. Other Pennsylvanians had settled near him and formed the nucleus of a good congregation of Presbyterians and of an enlightened society. The uncle invited his young and aspiring nephew to come to the backwoods as the frontier is always called. His neighbors united in the same invitation. It comported exactly with the disposition and choice of the young man now in his nineteenth year. With tears in his eyes and with a heavy heart he bade adieu to his fond parents and other members of the affectionate family on Marsh Creek. I have often heard my father tell the sorrowful feelings he endured on leaving the home of his youth on a journey of five hundred miles to the unknown wilds of the western wilderness—infested then and for many years afterwards by unfriendly tribes of Indians and by white men also, little in advance of savages, in civilization, and observance of law and order. On an extreme frontier everywhere there are always found a few lawless and desperate men who resort thither to avoid the penalty of crime, and to find an immunity from punishment awarded to the wrongdoer, in older and better regulated communities. Happily for the world however, the destructive principle is counteracted or is weakened by the conservative. Upon Holston and Chucky, as the then new settlements were designated, the large mass of the new settlers were eminently conservative and law-abiding. Perhaps in no other frontier community was there ever exhibited a simplicity as primitive or a patriotism as genuine and efficient as then existed in Washington County of North Carolina. There our young and adventurous immigrant found a home first in the house of his mother's brother. At an early period, after his arrival there, it became known that he understood surveying. His compass and chain he had brought with him. With his horse these constituted his entire fortune. He needed nothing further. These gave him at once employment, competency and position. Either as principal or as deputy, he held at the same time the office of surveyor, sheriff and clerk. He was nineteen years old when he left Pennsylvania but the minor age worked no disqualification for office. Every inhabitant and many non-residents were entering their land warrants on the vacant territory and the compass became an instrumentality in extending the new settlements, not less necessary and effective than the axe and the rifle.

When in 1784 the cession to congress by the legislature of North Carolina of her western counties had produced general excitement and dissatisfaction west of the Alleghenies, Francis A. Ramsey took sides with the

insurgents. He was secretary of one of the conventions whose action withdrew the allegiance of the western people from the mother state and established for them a new commonwealth thereafter known as the State of Franklin. Under this anomalous government he held offices both civil and military. He was one of the council of state and was sent by the Franklin authorities on an embassy to negotiate the terms of separation between the two now antagonistic and rival governments. During these civil commotions, when Franklin had ceased to be and the western people had returned to their allegiance to North Carolina, passing on official business to New Bern through Mecklenburg County Colonel Ramsey formed the acquaintance of Miss Peggy, eldest daughter as has been mentioned, of John McKnitt Alexander. On the seventh of April 1789 she became his wife. Soon after this date they moved across the mountain and settled on Little Limestone Creek. The property has since been occupied by Mr. Broils, I believe, and is not far from the present cross of the E. T. & V. R. R. They had both previous to their marriage been members of the Presbyterian Church. They were now within the bounds of Salem Congregation of which Reverend Samuel Doak was the pastor. Here my oldest brother William Baine Alexander was born on the twenty-sixth of March 1791. During the next or the succeeding year my parents removed to the Swan Pond in the present Knox County, Tennessee. The authorities of the Southwestern Territory had organized a court for the District of Hamilton. Of this court my father was made the clerk. It held its sessions at Knoxville, a recently established town and now the seat of the territorial government. My father had made several most eligible locations of land in this county. On several accounts the Swan Pond was the most desirable location for a residence. It was the center and nucleus of a Presbyterian congregation—the uplands were exceedingly fertile, a good proportion of lowland suitable for meadows, a small clear lake of four or five feet depth spread its beautiful expanse south of a peninsula sufficiently large for the yard and grounds around the site of the buildings and also for a large garden and orchard. On this peninsula he determined to erect a mansion for a permanent home. Apprehending malaria from the exhalation of such an extent of water, he cut through the beaver dam, which by obstructing the branches above it had formed the little lake, and by suitable ditches succeeded in draining it off so as to bring all the submerged land into tillage or grass. In place of the beautiful Swan Pond, as known to hunters and peltry men for more than a hundred years, it has now the verdure and

beauty of a Pennsylvania meadow, unsurpassed in the luxuriance of its grasses and the depth of its alluvial soil.

At first Colonel Ramsey erected a temporary residence twenty feet by twenty feet a little in the rear and east of the site he had selected for his family mansion. It was of hewn logs, one story high, a stone chimney in one corner, and covered with lap shingles. (In this cabin I was born March 25, 1797.)⁴

My second brother John McKnitt Alexander was born the second of May 1793 and probably at this place. My third brother Samuel Reynolds, was born August 9, 1795, and this writer, James Gettys McGready, was born on the twenty-fifth of March 1797.

In the meantime Colonel Ramsey, in pursuance of his original purpose, had contracted with an architect and carpenter, Thomas Hope, who had learned his trade in London. The first work he did in Tennessee was on my father's house. It was a large stone structure, a deep basement, and an attic besides two tall stories. Its corners, its arches, the top of its chimneys, and one row of building rocks, midway between the ground and the top of the square, were built of pure blue limestone, while the wall throughout, was built of red granite. Its style was Gothic, long narrow windows, cornices richly carved in wood, but painted to resemble stone, massive, elaborately finished and ornamented. It is even yet a tasteful and imposing structure. At the census of 1800 it was the most costly and most admired building in Tennessee. This, his first job in the state, soon brought to Mr. Hope more work than he could execute. Dr. Joseph Churchill Strong, Colonel Charles McClung and Captain John Kain afterwards employed him on their mansions. He was not only an architect, but also a cabinet-maker, and an upholsterer. The tall and elegant secretary and bookcase in which the fancy volumes of Colonel Ramsey's library were placed and a massive bureau were made by Mr. Hope also. In the construction he used as embellishments some American woods he had never seen before (sumac was one of them). As may well be excused in an English mechanic, he put upon his workmanship on the top of Colonel Ramsey's secretary the English lions and the unicorn. Colonel Ramsey refused to receive the work till he had placed the American eagles in suitable propinquity to and above the armorials of British royalty.

This old-time honored family mansion is six miles east of Knoxville

⁴In 1927 the Bonny Kate Chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution erected a marble monument on the site of the cabin to mark Dr. Ramsey's birthplace.

and on the road to Dandridge. For twenty-three years it was occupied by its first proprietor and was up to the time of his death in November 1820 a center of a generous hospitality, refined and elegant and not less sincere, unostentatious and cordial. After his decease it became the distributive share of my father's large real estate to my brother Colonel W. B. A. Ramsey since secretary of state at Nashville. At his removal to the seat of government he sold the property to me. I conveyed it to my son Colonel Francis A. Ramsey, thus named for his grandfather. He occupied it several years before the Confederate War. While he was in that service it was sold and it now belongs to a stranger. *Sic transit gloria mundi*. It was a house of prayer, and of praise. A home for the minister of religion, the stranger, the widow, the orphan, the exile and the homeless! That old Mansion! with its pointed gables, quaint cornices and antique windows! Dear old home with its gay dreams and sunny hours, and cloudless skies, and visions of bliss and glorious happiness gone! All gone! gone! ⁵

⁵ Later in his *Autobiography* Dr. Ramsey made further comments about his father's house. "It was" he said, "almost the oldest North Carolina grant in this section of the country. My father had entered it in 1786 when he, General White, and Colonel Love were the first to explore that frontier. . . . The place is a little historical. Beavers had constructed their dam below the confluence of two small streams. This formed a pond covering perhaps two hundred acres. To this vast quantities of aquatic birds resorted especially in winter, amongst others the swan in large droves. At a very early day French and Spanish traders ascended the river to the *Fork* (afterwards Mecklenburg) a mile from it and procured valuable cargoes of feathers, furs, and peltries generally. Within my own recollection the traders' path could still be seen. The remains of an old house built by a Mr. Evans, the pioneer hunter and peltzman, are also within my recollection. It stood on Mrs. Breck's part of the same plantation on an eminence commanding a view of the house and Cumberland mountains on the north and the Alleghanies on the south. When I first saw these remains there were bearing peach trees standing near them. Their fruit was most delicious. It was then called the French peach, and from it the large silver colored and juicy peach still in the neighborhood is believed to be derived. These vestiges have long since disappeared. They were not far from a more recent structure occupied by Mr. Jeremiah M. Monday. It can be made the most beautiful place in Knox County.

"Swan Pond is historical furthermore as the oldest, finest, and most costly structure erected in this part of Tennessee. At the close of the administration of Washington my father began it. The architect was from London, Thomas Hope, a regularly trained worker and carver in wood. At the census of 1800 it was the best house in the state. Its style is Gothic. Its corners are all blue limestone while the arches and the [row] of stone above and next to them are of the same material. For twenty years it was the home of the pioneer, the stranger, the widow and the orphan. It was also the home of the Christian minister. A whole Presbytery held its synod in its ancient and venerable hall. For the same length of time it was the house of prayer. Morning and evening it was vocal with the reading of God's word, singing his praises, and with the incense of prayer around the family altar erected for His worship. These memories of the past would be pleasant especially to this writer but for the reflection that within the last ten years the house has been desecrated often to the rapid inroads of the rude, the vulgar, and uncultivated,—often to the fun, folly, frolic and vulgarity of vagrant—and perhaps, too, often to the purposes of licentiousness and crime. Such is the history though of the world and of man. The ashes of the Father of the Faithful are surrounded now by pagans and idolaters. Mount Zion is now a Turkish harem. The primitive churches planted by Christ's apostles no longer exist and have been supplanted by the temples of the heathen, of Gentile, the infidel, the licentious and the profane. It is so ordained of Heaven. It is *quoad hoc* all right. I yield to it and submit."

HERITAGE AND YOUTH

11

Thou art tumbling to the dust, old pile
Thou art hastening to thy fall;
And round thee in thy loneliness
Clings the ivy to thy wall
The occupants are scattered now
Who knelt before thy shrine,
And silence reigns where anthems rose
In days of Auld Lang Syne.

And sadly sighs the wandering wind
Where oft in years gone by
Prayers rose from many hearts to Him
The Highest of the High.
The tramp of many a busy foot
That sought thy halls is o'er
And many a weary heart around
Is still forever more. •

How doth Ambitions, hope take wing!
How droops the spirit now!
We hear the distant city's din,
The dead are mute below.
The Sun which shone upon their paths
Now gilds their lowly graves—
The zephyrs which once fanned their brow
The grass above them waves.

Oh! could we call the many back
Who've gathered here in vain;
Who've careless roved where we do now
Who'll never meet again—
How would our very souls be stirred
To meet the earnest gaze
Of the lovely and the beautiful;
The lights of other days!

This digression from the main object of the writer of these pages, has been suggested by the fond recollections of his early home, and of the dear parents and other near relatives whose remains are mouldering in the cemetery nearest to the Old Stone House. The family genealogy is resumed.

My next brother, William Baine Alexander, was born November 28, 1801. Francis Alexander Ramsey, the last child of my own mother, was born October 18, 1804.

My mother, Peggy Alexander died of consumption July 9, 1805, aged thirty-nine years three months and four days. I was then eight years old,

but can distinctly recollect the whole scene and it is still vividly impressed upon my memory. Her life and character as a lady, as a wife, a mother and as a Christian, have been fully portrayed in a funeral sermon by Reverend Robert Henderson, her favorite preacher. That sermon preached from a text of her own selection and another preached at her own request in her sick chamber and entitled "The Christian Hope" were both published by my disconsolate and bereaved father in pamphlet form and were extensively distributed among her relations and religious acquaintances. They were afterwards published in book form in "Sermons by Reverend Robert Henderson, of Murfreesboro, Tennessee, in eleven volumes." The reader is referred to them.

After the death of his wife Colonel Ramsey was inconsolable and bereaved. She had hung around his neck like a jewel. Of their children three sons had preceded her to the grave, viz. William Baine Alexander Ramsey died March 21, 1799 nearly eight years old. His name was given to an infant son not yet named. Samuel Reynolds Ramsey died September 16, 1800 suddenly aged five years and Francis Alexander Ramsey died November 23, 1804 aged five weeks. These heavy bereavements were tolerable compared with that occasioned by the death of the mother of his living and dead children. The pang was for a time too heavy to be borne. His solitude became insufferable. His father-in-law wrote to him to visit Alexandria with his four now motherless children. He did so and in the fall of 1805 he with them spent a few weeks in Mecklenburg County, North Carolina. Returning to his desolated home at Swan Pond he received a similar request from his aged parents to bring his children to Gettysburg, Pennsylvania to see their grandparents who now lived in that village. In the spring of 1806 that visit was accomplished. He took his children from there on a visit to some friends in Baltimore. Coming back to Gettysburg he renewed his acquaintance with Mrs. Ann Fleming, widowed daughter of Judge Agnew. They were married in the fall and removed soon after to Swan Pond. Soon after this my brother John McKnitt A. Ramsey, at the time a student of Blount College in Knoxville, died in that city. My step-mother on the birth of a son soon after, named her own son for my deceased brother, John McKnitt Alexander.

My grandparents at Gettysburg began to feel the infirmities of age aggravated by the absence of their two sons in Tennessee. The sons invited them to come and spend the evening of their life with them. They came accordingly, but the milder climate of their adopted state rejuvenated them

so much that they again took up house on a small farm in the Grassy Valley near Ebenezer Church of which their son, Reverend S. G. Ramsey was pastor. Their widowed daughter, Mrs. King, lived with them and married soon after a Mr. Taylor. My aunt did not survive long after this event, dying of puerperal convulsions. She was buried in Ebenezer Church yard. This heavy bereavement drove the aged couple back to my father's house where in happy tranquillity they passed the remainder of their days. My father's uncle, John Alexander, who had been kind to him when he came a boy and a stranger to the new country on Chucky in 1783, had now become infirm, blind and poor. His past kindnesses to the nephew were now amply repaid. He had him brought from Limestone, settled him on his own farm, and near to the old mansion in a neat frame cottage where he ended his days at an advanced age. He was the grandfather of the late Chancellor Samuel Ramsey Rodgers, of Knoxville. Besides these benefactions my father brought around him other distant relatives, old, destitute and infirm: Hannah Moreton, Mrs. Patton, and Mrs. Hawthorn and others. His religion was a religion of deeds of charity and kindness to all but especially to those of the house-hold of faith.

My grandmother died in my father's house about 1814, my grandfather in March 1817. They were gathered to their fathers at an extreme old age and were interred in the family burying ground at the Fork (Lebanon) Church.

Colonel Ramsey was a steady patron of schools and learning in his neighborhood. Common school teachers on the frontier were not always at hand and were often incompetent. To supply this great deficit he often employed educated young men as clerks in his office (then kept according to law in his house and in the country) and as instructors of his children. The first of these was John Naylor Gamble from Pennsylvania. His penmanship was elegant, and may still be seen in the records of Hamilton District and other courts in Knoxville. The second was William Smith from New England and a third, Mr. Lyle Humphreys from Limestone near Washington College. These were all good tutors, the latter a classical scholar with whom my brother William and myself began our Latin studies. About 1809 we were sent to Ebenezer Academy then revived under the care and instruction of our uncle Reverend S. G. Ramsey. He had quite a large class, the sons of gentlemen and the elite of the country. James Houston, a graduate of Washington College and a great linguist—a student of theology under my uncle and a rigid disciplinarian was em-

ployed as assistant teacher in the academy. I have always thought that my knowledge of classical literature might be mainly ascribed to his attainments in Latin and Greek. The health of our principal was precarious and I had often the duty assigned me of hearing the recitations of the more advanced young men. I found this very conducive to my own progress. My brother and myself were throughout the whole of our course of studies then and afterwards, kept in the same class. We remained at Ebenezer till October 1814, having been there five years, when we were sent to Washington College. We took an advanced position even in Dr. Doak's classes. He was a graduate of Nassau Hall in its palmiest days under John Witherspoon D.D. its accomplished president. Being in advance of most of the members of the class we devoted some time to the study of Hebrew and at the commencement, March 1816, we received the degree of Bachelor of Arts—I in my nineteenth and my brother in his seventeenth year. Returning home I availed myself one year of the miscellaneous reading my father's large library afforded. In the early summer of 1817 I entered the office of my never to be forgotten *Medicæ Preceptor* Joseph Churchill Strong M. D. the senior physician of Knoxville, Tennessee. In the meantime I had though under age been elected register of Knox County. This afforded an agreeable diversity of employment and some emolument.

During my first year's study under Dr. Strong my step-mother lost her health and in November she died during my absence to Salem, North Carolina whither I had gone for the purpose of bringing home my sister Eliza who had been sent there to school. On our return we found our father the second time a widower.

I continued to reside in the family of Dr. Strong, studying medicine, attending to his drug-store, keeping his books and writing in my office. I was the favorite of the doctor's students and had charge of his keys, his bank deposits and sometimes visited his patients. He was an excellent teacher of medicine—was the senior physician of the country and his practical remarks had always the validity of medical axioms. After more than two years of diligent application to medical studies, in the October of 1819 I went on horse back to Gettysburg where I left my horse and took the stages to Philadelphia. Dr. Strong gave me letters of introduction to the medical faculty of the University of Pennsylvania.⁶ In the class of 1819

⁶ One of the letters, addressed to Dr. N. Chapman, and dated September 21, 1819, read: "I take the liberty to introduce to you Doctor James Ramsey a Student of Medicine. He has resided with me for two years past and now wishes to attend the Lectures at Philadelphia. From the encouragement you gave me when at your house in the fall of 1816 to introduce

and 1820 I never lost a day—not even one lecture. I took notes of all the lectures of all the professors except Dr. Robert Hare on chemistry. I laid in a good medical library in the city. Returning to Knoxville I went to Memphis, then only a hamlet—to Brownsville, and other very infant villages intending to settle somewhere in the Western District.

My father in the meantime had married in April of 1820 his third wife, Mrs. Margaret Humes of Knoxville. A few months afterwards he received the appointment of president of the new state bank then first organized. Preparing to put his bank into operation he remained late and early in the office of (Scotch) James Campbell, the cashier. It stood at the corner of Cumberland and Water street not far from First Creek and Kennedy's mill dam. Here he contracted malarial fever. Unwilling to prescribe where the patient was my father I invited Dr. Strong to take the case. Dr. King was called in consultation. They attended him faithfully but on the fifth of November 1820 he breathed his last. His remains were taken from Knoxville followed by a large concourse of mourning citizens and friends to the family burying ground at Lebanon.⁷

The death of Colonel Ramsey produced a general sorrow in the community of which he had been so long a prominent member. The Presbyterian Church had lost one of its brightest ornaments—his own congregation, Lebanon, had been deprived of one of its founders and its most distinguished, as he was the most zealous and exemplary, of its elders. The poor and the friendless had lost their benefactor and their sympathising friend and counsellor. To the stranger he had always extended a cordial welcome—a warm hand and an open purse. In all the relations of life—a son, a brother, a husband, a father, neighbor, citizen, public officer and patriot he was dutiful, faithful—active, useful, exemplary—public spirited and enterprising—enlightened, a true lover of his country and a good man. He cared not for wealth only as a means of benevolence and beneficence to others. From his first arrival on the frontier in 1783 to the time of his death in 1820—a period of thirty-seven years he was never without office. Offices were showered upon him and he proved himself competent and worthy of them: offices which implied ability, probity, efficiency and zeal in the public service, and high personal character. It is no indelicacy in this writer to refer thus to the character of a deceased father, indeed to have omitted

students to you, I now with pleasure recommend to your friendly attention the young gentleman who is the bearer of this. His correct deportment, industry, integrity and moral conduct cannot fail to give satisfaction to his Preceptors."

⁷ Knoxville *Register*, November 7, 1820.

what has here been said of him would have been infidelity to historical truth and in this writer a filial impiety. For a more special account of the deceased the reader is referred to "Ramsey's Annals of Tennessee" *passim*.⁸

⁸ Cf., John T. Fain, *Fain's Critical and Analytical Index and Genealogical Guide to Ramsey's Annals of Tennessee* (1920). For further details about many of the people mentioned in the Autobiography, consult the East Tennessee Historical Society's *The French Broad-Holston Country* (1946).