

A Love That Laughs at Locksmiths



Sometimes, it is the family narrative histories that are the most fun to read for they can provide more of an insight into the lives and emotions of those who lived before us than is provided in a mere recounting of names and dates drawn from a generational chart. I found the following in a book, “The Houstons of Pequea,” and it features a headstrong Mary Johnston who is related to my daughter-in-law.

“As the Johnston family was moving from Lancaster to their new home in Franklin county, they stopped at a country school house to get water from the spring, and to inquire their way. The teacher was Mr. Hunter, a man of fine character and ability. Mary Johnston, a girl of refinement and spirit, was scarcely over fifteen, but in this brief interview at the schoolhouse an affection sprang up between these two that could not be severed. The parents looked with disfavor on this union, and this gave rise to a romance which has been cherished by succeeding generations. Difference of opinion in religious matters seems to have been the obstacle. Thomas Johnston was a rigid Associate Presbyterian. John Hunter was an Associate Reformed and they could not be reconciled.

But the “love that laughs at locksmiths” proved stronger than parental authority, and when Mary found that she would not be permitted to be married under her father’s roof, she mounted her horse and, accompanied by her cousin, Mary Murray, who had

been brought up with the family, rode to Mercersburg, where John Hunter stood holding two horses, one of them wearing a woman's saddle. Throwing the rein to her cousin, Mary dismounted, placed her foot in the hand of her lover and springing to the saddle, rode away to a long and happy married life.

The Hunters held a high position in social and religious circles and were successful in a financial way. After some years in McConnellsburg, they moved to Mercersburg, where they ended their days. They had one child: Mary Anne Hunter."

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