

**PERSONAL
RECOLLECTIONS
OF WILLIAM KITE**

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Personal Recollections of William Kite by Edwin C. Jellett

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A PAPER WRITTEN FOR THE "THE GERMANTOWN
. . . HORTICULTURAL SOCIETY," AND READ AT
. . . ITS MEETING, MARCH TWELFTH, NINE-
. . . TEEN HUNDRED.
. . . BY RESOLUTION OF EVEN DATE, ORDERED
. . . PRINTED BY THE SOCIETY.

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PERSONAL RECOLLECTIONS
OF WILLIAM KITE.

On the morning of the day of our last meeting at this place, I was startled to hear of the death of William Kite. I had known him so long, and he was so much a part of this community, that I never thought of a time, when we should be called upon, to go on without him. Like days which come with brightness, we saw him here, and like new days which follow in their course, so I looked for him to reappear. His familiar presence and kindly face, we shall see no more, but his youthful interest, his inspiring enthusiasm, his simple goodness, must live with us until the end.

I am not fitted, nor is it my purpose to present a biographical sketch. Other members of this society knew Mr. Kite for a longer period than I, other friends were more closely associated with him, and upon those intimate relations which best discover the source, of which all outward expression is but a meagre reflection, I

prefer to be silent, leaving to those to whom it rightfully belongs, the preparation of a worthy memorial. My object is, to present in a simple way, some of Mr. Kite's own recollections, and if the little I can give, will enable you to become better acquainted with the gentle spirit which has left us, then I shall feel a duty done, and the most I hope for, will be satisfied.

Before the Friends' new library was built, and when books were distributed from Friends' Meeting on Coulter street, I was a scholar at St. Luke's Episcopal Church, and Mr. Kite I frequently saw, but I did not become acquainted with him until the spring of 1875. At that time I was a messenger boy in Germantown, and being anxious to improve myself, I sought the privileges of the library, which had then been removed to Main street. Procuring an application slip and securing the necessary endorsement, I approached the library in a very uncertain frame of mind. I say uncertain frame of mind, because as I walked up the steps to the building, I felt not a little uneasy. Several times I had gone to the library to read, and somehow, I had

formed an opinion, that Mr. Kite was a very stern man. I had heard him warn, and afterwards "lecture" boys, who persisted in talking above a whisper. I had seen him chase boys who came in to annoy him by taking tracts they did not wish, and I was prepared to have him tell me "begone," when I presented my note. But Mr. Kite did not tell me "begone." Instead, he spoke to me kindly, asked me where I worked, what I did, and inquired what book I cared to have, and when I could not tell him, he directed me to pick out one to suit myself. The uneasiness I felt, disappeared at once, and forever.

Mr. Kite, both mentally and physically, was the finest specimen of a rare good age I ever met. As you well know, he stood nearly erect, and until recently, his step was vigorous. When I saw Mr. Gladstone in 1894 he looked like an old man. At 85, Mr. Kite was active and alert; his "eyes had not dimmed, nor had his natural force abated." But far beyond this was the hopefulness of his nature. I never before knew one so old, so young. Mr. Kite never to me displayed the weaknesses peculiar to extreme old age.

He ever kept himself interested in the things about him, and endeavored to keep abreast of the progress of the day. It was one of my privileges and delights to meet Mr. Kite at the library, and many evenings I spent there with him, listening to accounts of old Philadelphia history, accounts which gave him as much pleasure to give, as it did to the hearer to receive. At other times his talks were of birds, of plants, and of other subjects of a more or less scientific nature. Mr. Kite believed in the study of nature, and he thought it a pity that more attention was not given the subject in the public schools.

At the time of the change in the Horticultural Society several years ago Mr. Kite was not a little disturbed, because he heard that those in control cared little for the society, and that so long as the "reserve" held good, the money in the treasury would be freely spent. Upon my assuring him that the reverse of this was the truth, he seemed relieved, and said he wished he were younger, so he could take a more active part in the work. Mr. Kite did take an active part in the meetings of the society, as the older