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DUELLING IN VIRGINIA.

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Until the necessity for study and self-denial as to social parties became absolute in my case, I was a guest at many of these "soirees" and enjoyed them keenly. Those at the home of Dr. William Browne (who, as before stated, married one of the gifted sisters—Stone) were specially delightful. They were genial and informal. The music on the piano was by his daughter, Miss Mary Green Browne, who had genius and skill in high degree. The violin was played by the doctor himself, and the accord was so perfect that it inspired all.

It was during those years that it became a common source of enjoyment to the ladies and more refined men of the town to make up walking parties, and, in the temperate and delicious afternoons of the autumn season to walk out of the town, generally to the spot known as the "Alum Spring Rock," about two miles from the Court House in Fredericksburg. A mill site and dam for the old "Drummond's Mill" then existed and a lake of pure water of the

*This is Chapter 6 of the Autobiography of R. R. Howison (1820-1906). See *William and Mary Quarterly*, v. 2, Second Series, No. 4, pp. 221-238.

"Hazel Run" was just in front of the "Alum Spring Rock." In the freezes during the winter seasons this lake was frequented by many skaters. It furnished also the very hardest and best ice, which was eagerly gathered into the ice-houses, private and public, in Fredericksburg, and was advertised as "Alum Spring ice," and highly appreciated.

In subsequent days, the dam was broken again and again by the violent current of the Hazel Run in freshets. It was rebuilt nearly half a mile lower down, and the mill and its appurtenances became a part of the "Braehead" property. I was obliged to expend considerable sums in restoring or repairing the dam. The old mill yielded well in revenue, because the meal ground there was of excellent quality.

About 1872 the mill tract and one hundred and fifty acres near it were sold to Chambers Brent, formerly of Kentucky, who married my niece, Lucy Cook Beale. A few years thereafter the dam was again washed away by the impetuous torrent of the run, swollen by several days of continuous rain. It was not reconstructed. About Christmas time in 1894 all of the picturesque old mill that was destructible was consumed by accidental fire. Yet the "Brent's Mill" voting precinct has been continued.

Mr. Chambers Brent was a good, kind-hearted man, but beset by indisposition to exertion of soul and body. This was, in large measure, the result of invalid health. He died happy in Christian hope. Some years after his death his widow was united in marriage to Frederick W. Page, Librarian of the University of Virginia. Political changes in Rectors and Visitors disturbed him for some years, but he regained the office for which he was admirably fitted by nature and study. His wife died in 1897, at their home near the University.

The "Alum Spring Rock" just mentioned was an interesting formation of nature in past ages. The rock is granite but seamed with small channels of almost pure alum. The rock rises to a height of more than twenty feet, and has a

length of a hundred feet or more. It is separated from the site of the former lake of pure water by an even pathway of five or six feet in width.

The spot being shut in from ordinary view by small areas of surrounding forests, interlaced in many places by wild vines and shrubbery, has many charms for those who love to view and to frequent the reserved retreats of nature. But these same seclusions made it also a very suitable place for the principals, seconds, and surgeons in the not infrequent duels, with mortal weapons, which occurred in the "duelling times" of Virginia. And it is by no means certain that these times have passed away.

Duelling is private war. Public war is a condition running so far back into the dim ages of the past that authentic history has not disclosed its origin. All that is certain is that God, who is Love, did not originate nor decree war. War originated in the wicked vindictive passions and propensities of fallen human nature. And yet war has been so constant and prolonged as a condition of human society that—like slavery, and the "Lex Talionis"—Law of Retaliation—and the Law of Divorce from the bond of marriage at the mere will or caprice of the husband, God, in His infinite wisdom, has seen fit to tolerate all these hoary evils, and even to regulate and modify them until the time when He shall see fit to deracinate and destroy them. He has already destroyed three of them utterly and finally, in all lands pretending to civilization. But public war yet continues, and will continue until the complete reign of the Prince of Peace, over hearts and lives, shall cause that "men shall learn war no more." And all these conditions apply also to private war or "duelling." Human constitutions and laws of the most stringent and comprehensive character have forbidden it and sought to end it. Yet duelling continues and will be practiced by men—honorable in the sight of man, but unchristian in the sight of God—until the

Kingdom of Christ shall be established in all hearts. Then duelling will cease.

When I commenced the systematic study of law, and read carefully the "Commentaries on the Laws of England," by Sir William Blackstone, I was much impressed by the deep insight into fallen human nature shown by the following passage in the Fourth Book on "Public Wrongs." Chittys Edit., p. 152:

"This takes in the case of deliberate duelling, where both parties meet, avowedly, with an intent to murder; thinking it their duty as gentlemen, and claiming it as their right to wanton with their own lives and those of their fellow creatures without any warrant or authority from any power either divine or human, but in direct contradiction to the laws both of God and man, and therefore the law has justly fixed the crime and punishment of murder on them, and on their seconds also. Yet it requires such a degree of passive valor to combat the dread of even undeserved contempt arising from the false notions of honor too generally received in Europe, that the strongest prohibitions and penalties of the law will never be entirely effectual to eradicate this unhappy custom; till a method be found out of compelling the original aggressor to make some other satisfaction to the affronted party, which the world shall esteem equally reputable as that which is now given at the hazard of the life and fortune, as well of the person insulted as of him who hath given the insult."

What a commentary is this on the slavery to the domination of "the world" involved in duelling, and of the absolute necessity for submission to the laws of Christ in order to put an end to this barbarous practice!

In Virginia, the cavalier spirit prevailing in colonial times had silently and almost insensibly affected all classes of society, even down to the negro-slaves, and was cherished by a great majority of all men, women and children. This spirit upheld the duel as a legitimate method of redress for injured honor.

The result was that duels were, from time to time, fought all through the periods of settlement and colonization down to the war of Revolution. And they continued during the Revolution and after it.

The fierce passions and personal encounters in debate engendered by the political questions which arose after the independence of the States was established, and was fully acknowledged by Great Britain and the leading European powers, were a seething fountain whence issued many germs of fatal duels. Another cause was found in jealousies concerning women lashed into frenzies, in many cases, by the habits of flirtation practiced by only too many of the beautiful and the fascinating belles of Virginia. A fiction on this subject, probably having a deep foundation in truth, appears in the October number, 1900, of McClure's Magazine. A third frequent source of duels was found in words published or spoken and "considered as insulting according to their ordinary meaning."

The first Constitution of Virginia, as a State, adopted in 1776, and the early laws giving to the common law of England full force and authority, in the Commonwealth, in all matters not changed by the Constitution or by positive statute law, imposed no special disabilities as to duelling. As the common law, as shown by Sir William Blackstone, "fixed the crime and punishment of murder" on the principal in a fatal duel, and also on both seconds, this was considered a sufficient deterrent by the able men who enacted the Constitution and early laws.

But not many years had passed before it was discovered that the crime of duelling involved peculiar conditions, and required peculiar remedies. It was not eradicated by the common law, because juries would not convict men of murder who, after having given or received insult or other provocation, had fairly and according to what they regarded as a "code of honor" arranged a hostile meeting, and had stood up and faced each other on terms perfectly

equal, and had fought a private battle in which one had been slain.

But as frequent duels occurred in Virginia between men of high character and standing, and many of them resulted in deaths which deeply affected the welfare of families and of the State, it was felt that some more potent deterrent ought to be employed. Therefore constitutions and laws were adopted and enacted which have been, in substance and with the best intentions continued to the present time. They were intended to apply to the most common causes of duels, and to turn these very causes into strong motives against practicing such combats, or any of their antecedent or attendant methods.

These constitutional and legislative enactments have provided that no person who, while a citizen of the State, has engaged in a duel, has sent or accepted a challenge, or knowingly conveyed a challenge, or aided or assisted in any manner in fighting a duel, shall be allowed to vote or hold any office of honor, profit or trust.

These laws also impose the penalties of confinement in jail and severe pecuniary fines on any person who fights a duel with any deadly weapon, though no death ensue; or sends or delivers a challenge or acts as second, and imposes the penalties of murder on any person resident in the State who leaves it for the purpose of evading the laws against duelling, and outside of the State engages in a duel, and murders his adversary.

They also impose the penalty of confinement in jail, and pecuniary fine, on any person who posts another, or in writing or in print uses any reproachful or contemptuous language to or concerning another, for not fighting a duel, or for not sending or accepting a challenge.

Assuredly therefore the spirit of Virginia, as manifested by her forms of Constitution and law, is against duelling and all its usual causes and concomitants. And there can be no reasonable doubt that the provisions imposing disabilities as to voting and holding office have acted as a

powerful deterrent against duelling and all that ordinarily leads to it, in the cases of the very classes of men whom Virginia specially desired to influence for good on this subject.

But notwithstanding all these obstacles of human law, duels, often fatal in their results, have continued in Virginia and in other parts of the civilized world; and they will continue until divine law, gaining power by personal devotion and loyalty to Christ, shall prevail over earthly and false sense of honor.

I have thought that a brief narrative of some of the mortal duels, of the nineteenth century, fought in Virginia, and especially at the "Alum Spring Rock" previously mentioned, and in the region not far from it, and in or near the capital city of Virginia, may be interesting and monitory, and not without effect, in the efforts which all soundly thinking men are making to bring to an end this evil usage.

These narratives are founded on traditions so constant and self-sustaining as to deserve credit, and on written statements furnished to me, at my request, by such men as the late Robert W. Briggs, the gifted son of a well-known lawyer, David Briggs, who after practicing in Stafford and the adjoining counties, fixed his residence in Fredericksburg and afterwards removed to Richmond and practiced in the higher courts there, especially in the Courts of Equity, on the dockets of which his name as counsel is found perhaps more frequently than that of any other lawyer, during the period of his residence. Dr. Andrew Glassell Grinnan, of Madison County, near Madison Mills, Virginia, a brother of Robert Grinnan hereinbefore mentioned in connection with the visit of President Andrew Jackson to Fredericksburg in 1833, and a lineal descendant from John Glassell, whose daughter, Joanna Glassell, married that Duke of Argyll who was the father of the late Duke, and grandfather of the Marquis of Lorne who was married to the Princess Louisa, daughter of the Empress Queen of

Great Britain; Hon. W. W. Scott, Librarian of Virginia; Major Philip A. Wellford, of Richmond, son of the late Dr. Beverly A. Wellford, and related to many well-known families, and William G. Stanard, corresponding secretary and librarian of the Virginia Historical Society, and who has done much valuable work for departments of Virginia history.

It is a fact somewhat strange that though the evidence thus obtained has thrown light on nearly all the material facts of the earlier duels herein narrated, yet none of it has enabled me to fix, with exact or even proximate accuracy, the years in which they were fought. Probably a reason for this may be that the subjects were painful, and such as led the immediate relatives or friends to shrink from all written statements. But whatever the cause, the fact exists, and has compelled me to adopt inferential evidences which may or may not have led to accurate dates.

The first of these duels to be noted was one of the saddest and most deplorable. It was that between John Seddon and Peter Vivian Daniel, both well-known residents of the county of Stafford, and for years on terms of friendship with each other. John Seddon was a business man having agricultural interests, and who, having a bright mind and earnest nature, took a decided part in the political movements of his day. He was brother to Thomas Seddon, long a resident of Fredericksburg and a highly esteemed officer of the "Farmer's Bank of Virginia" in its Fredericksburg branch. John Seddon was therefore the uncle of James A. Seddon, noted heretofore in this work, and who became a well-known lawyer, a member of the United States Congress, and the Confederate Secretary of War.

Peter V. Daniel was a lawyer in Stafford who stood high in his profession. He was not esteemed as an orator, but was accurate in law-learning, and logical in his forms of thought. He gained reputation and influence enough to be appointed one of the associate judges of the Supreme Court of the United States, and gave one of the most trenchant

written opinions delivered in the "Dred Scott Case" in 1856. He belonged to a widely known and prominent family. He was twice married; his last marriage was when he was well advanced in life, and the lady became the victim of an accident by fire, leaving an infant son only eight months old. The sad event for a time covered Richmond over as by a pall of gloom.

John Seddon and Peter V. Daniel both entered into national politics, and though friends, they differed widely in their views. The duel between them certainly occurred between 1810 and 1820. A review of all known facts leads me to the belief that the year was 1812 or not far from it. At that time the people of the United States were profoundly moved by the question whether war ought or ought not to be declared against Great Britain because of her continued practice of wrongs and outrages in her adherence to her "Orders of Council," her impressment of American seamen, and her seizure of American merchant ships and their cargoes. In the South the most prominent public men, embracing Henry Clay of Kentucky, John C. Calhoun, Langdon Cheeves and William Lowndes of South Carolina, and James Monroe of Virginia were all earnest advocates of a declaration of war. But, on the other hand, many eminent statesmen of the North united with Albert Gallatin in opposing war, and William Pinckney, the United States Attorney General, urged that his country was not prepared for war, especially with an antagonist so colossal as Great Britain. And John Randolph of Roanoke in Virginia opposed the war, on the broad ground which assuredly had much strength, that England was then engaged in a mortal combat with Napoleon Bonaparte who was seeking to crush all opposing sovereignties and to reduce all under his own imperial sway, and that so far from making war on Great Britain, the United States ought to regard England as representing the rights of mankind in this struggle, and ought not to embarrass her by war, but to bear patiently the indirect effects of her policy until success against Napoleon

should enable her to abandon it. On this question, therefore, much might be honorably urged on both sides.

In a public debate John Seddon and Peter V. Daniel took opposing views, and sharp words passed. We need not inquire what the words were. They will probably never be reproduced. All that is known is that Seddon regarded the words of Daniel as personally insulting and offensive to him, and demanded that they should be withdrawn. This Mr. Daniel refused and Mr. Seddon sent a challenge, which was accepted.

Mr. Daniel chose pistols. And from that time until the day of the duel he practiced incessantly with a pair of duelling pistols. A well supported tradition is that he became so sure and skilful in his aim that he was able to put his walking cane upright by sticking its ferruled end into the ground, and then at fifteen paces distance he struck it with his pistol-ball in a very large proportion of shots.

The hostile meeting did not take place in Virginia, but in Maryland, not far from the north bank of the Potomac river, and a short distance above a point opposite to Acquia Creek. Again we have a tradition which has been persistent and generally regarded as true. It is to the effect that John Seddon went on the selected ground in a dress very commonly worn by gentlemen at this period. He wore black pantaloons, a white vest and a cloth swallowtailed coat, so short in its facings and so buttoned that a distinct white line appeared. Yet neither he nor his second appear to have regarded his style of dress as subjecting him to any disadvantage. On the other hand, it is said that a few moments before the exchange of shots Mr. Daniel remarked in a subdued tone to his own second: "I think I shall strike Mr. Seddon about the button on the white line."

The shots were nearly simultaneous. Mr. Daniel was unhurt. But his bullet passed through the body of Mr. Seddon, having struck very nearly on the indicated button by the white line. The wound was mortal. The parties unhurt bore the wounded man to the boat, and all passed

hastily back to the Virginia shore. Mr. Seddon was carried to his home. He lived only a few days. Silence and quiet were observed by all who knew the facts. Under the law of Virginia as it then stood, no prosecution could be maintained, and the Maryland authorities did not feel called to make any move. In truth, any prosecuting measures would have been equally painful to the relations and friends of both of the combatants.

The body of John Seddon was interred, with funeral services, in the family cemetery on his country seat. It is about seven miles from Falmouth. Some of the family had been already laid to rest there, and some have been since.

About the year 1891 Miss Mary Scott, a blood relative of the Seddon family, died at her home, a very lofty and prominent seat on a hill about a mile below Falmouth, and looking down upon the Rappahannock. She had been my young schoolmate about the year 1825. She was a member of the Presbyterian Church in Fredericksburg, and as that church had been for some time without a pastor, a request was sent to me to attend and conduct the funeral. As no imperative duty conflicted, of course I complied. Besides the family and immediate relatives, a number of persons from Fredericksburg, Falmouth and the neighborhood attended. After the brief services at the home the funeral cortege of a number of carriages attended the hearse to the family cemetery, which was the same in which John Seddon had been buried. It was about seven miles from the residence of Miss Mary Scott. When the services at the grave were completed, I felt a strong desire to explore the venerable burying ground. It contained a number of graves, some with tombs of slate and inscriptions. Some without them. A thick and tangled growth of weeds, briars, coarse grasses and stubborn brushes filled almost every part of this home of the dead. But in a secluded corner I found the grave of John Seddon. It was covered by a marble slab of unusual size. The marble was discolored and dark from probably eighty years of exposure to rain, hail, wind and

drifting storms. The slab was very nearly resting flatly on the surface of the ground. If there had ever been a structure of brick or stone on which the slab rested it had gradually sunk below the surface. Yet, notwithstanding all these evidences of the work of time and decay, the inscription was easily read. It was as simple as possible, nothing but the memory, the name, the time of the birth, the time of the death. I gazed on it long and sadly. Its lesson is there, and will endure.

The next duel in order of time, and which probably occurred in or about the year 1815, was between William Glassell, of Fredericksburg (often styled Captain Glassell), and a Mr. Ritchie, whose first name I have not been able to learn even from the numerous manuscripts on the subject.

William Glassell was one of the sons of that John Glassell of Longwiddie, Scotland, about six miles from Edinburgh, who had been a very successful merchant, and whose daughter, Joanna, had married the Duke of Argyll, as heretofore stated. William Glassell came to Fredericksburg and became a merchant there. He had also a place of merchandise in Madison County, near to the estate called "Tothorwald," which was the home of his uncle, Andrew Glassell. William Glassell was successful in business, and respected as a citizen. While yet young he became a member of a cavalry company, and, with it, he joined the body of nearly fifteen thousand troops who marched under General Henry Lee to put down the "Whiskey Insurrection" in Pennsylvania in the year 1794. An account of this insurrection and of the prompt and wise action of President George Washington, by which it was speedily and effectually crushed, will be found in "The Students' United States," pages 556-558. A farther reference to it will occur herein. The cavalry company of which William Glassell was a member went as far as to a point somewhat beyond Fort Cumberland when, receiving official information that the insurgents had surrendered and dispersed and that their services were not needed, they returned to their homes.

William Glassell married a sister of Anthony Buck, a veteran and highly esteemed auctioneer of Fredericksburg. From this marriage no children were born. Mr. Ritchie was a resident of Essex County on the Rappahannock, but frequently visited Fredericksburg. He and William Glassell were intimate friends, and were both Freemasons and members of Lodge No. 4 in Fredericksburg, in which George Washington took his first degrees.

The Masons gave a large and brilliant ball, which was attended, as was then the usage, not only by the society people of the town, but by many from the near counties. William Glassell and Ritchie attended it. Glassell escorted to the gay scene a young lady who was an orphan girl, attractive and respected. She was a guest in the house of Glassell, and was under his care. During some of the events of the ball, Ritchie, probably while somewhat disordered by wine, offered a distinct insult to this young lady. He was promptly called to account by Glassell, and was requested to make suitable apology. He refused to apologize or to make any acknowledgement of wrongdoing. Glassell, after the ball, sent a formal challenge. Ritchie accepted it, and chose pistols as the weapons.

During the brief time before the fatal combat, Glassell procured the good offices of a friend of both parties, who had an interview with Ritchie and urged him to make a suitable acknowledgement and avoid the duel, informing him also that Glassell was specially skilled as a pistol shot—practice with the pistol having been a part of his education in Scotland. Ritchie refused all amicable settlement.

The duel was fought on the level walkway alongside of the "Alum Spring Rock" and in front of the clear lake. It was, in all respects, fair, and conducted according to what is called the "code of honor." At the first fire, Ritchie fell to the ground; Glassell hurried to his side and implored his forgiveness. Ritchie refused all forgiveness or recognition of the spirit in which it was asked. In a short time he died.

This fatal duel caused a great deal of excitement in Fredericksburg and the adjoining county. A warrant charging murder was issued and Glassell was arrested. But the Spotsylvania tribunal before whom the first examination took place, on hearing the evidence, promptly acquitted him, and he was discharged. He lived for many years after the duel, and died at the seat known as "The Oaks," on one of his return journeys from Richmond to Fredericksburg.

He was interred in the Masonic cemetery in the town. His father, John Glassell, then an old man in Scotland, caused a tomb to be prepared for his son whom he warmly loved. This tombstone was shipped to Norfolk to be sent to Fredericksburg, but the vessel bearing it was cast away on the storm-beaten shore of Cape Hatteras. At least six years afterwards the strongly banded box containing the tombstone was thrown up by the waves on the beach, and as the direction was still legible to Mr. George Murray, of Norfolk, who was a partner in the house of Murray, Grinnan & Mundell, of Fredericksburg, the box was duly forwarded; and the letter is still in existence from George Murray to Daniel Grinnan detailing the strange facts of this recovery which the sea gave up. Assuredly the preservation of that tomb was a part of God's providence.

Not long after the duel Andrew Glassell, of "Tothorwald," wrote to his nephew, William Glassell, a letter in which he solemnly sought to bring home to his conscience the sin of murder and urged him to repentance. To this William Glassell replied, denying the charge of murder, stating the facts, and by them exculpating himself and his own conscience from any guilt in the matter. And Mrs. Andrew Glassell warmly defended William, her nephew, and acquitted him of all guilt in this unhappy affair.

The next duel which claims our attention was between Francis Fitzhugh Conway and William Thornton, which was fought in or about the year 1817, and which was fatal to both the combatants. There was a blood relation between them, and as cousins they were as cordial to each

other as cousins of the more distant degrees generally are. But the same lady attracted both of them, and their jealousy on the question who would be preferred by her gave bitterness to the very small immediate cause of the quarrel, which was soon followed by the duel.

William Thornton was the son of Mr. and Mrs. Thornton who, soon after the close of the War of the Revolution, lived on their large country estate on the north side of the Rappahannock, not far below Snowden in Stafford County, and nearly opposite to the fertile lands now known as "Nottingham."

Dr. Robert Wellford, long well known as an eminent physician and surgeon in Fredericksburg, had been a surgeon in the British army service, and was with Sir William Howe at and after the battle of Brandywine, and the capture and occupation of Philadelphia in 1777. During that occupation it came to the knowledge of Washington that the American prisoners of war, held by Howe, suffered much from neglect in unhealthy quarters, and from want of adequate supplies of clothing, medicines and proper diet. He opened communication and remonstrated with Howe on the subject. The result was beneficial. Howe was indolent and self-indulgent, but not harsh nor cruel. Surgeon Wellford entered earnestly into these reforms. He became well acquainted with George Washington, and ever afterwards honored and revered him.

Surgeon Wellford became so much interested in the cause of American independence that he resigned his position in the British service, made Fredericksburg his home, and engaged successfully in the practice of medicine and surgery in the town and the neighboring country to a wide extent. He was trusted and sought in his profession, and being a man of culture and refinement, he was a favorite in society. As he grew older and after he married and was surrounded by a family, he became a devout Christian. His diary, which I have been permitted to examine, is often the chan-

nel of Christian thought, scriptural views and expressions of penitence.

In the military expedition against the "Whiskey insurgents" Dr. Wellford received the appointment of surgeon-in-chief from President Washington. He attended sedulously to the duties of his department during the whole campaign. He kept a journal of passing events which his descendants have courteously permitted me to read, and which ought to be in print. After the death of George Washington suddenly, unexpectedly, and while yet in the prime of advancing life, Dr. Wellford wrote out, and allowed to be published in a newspaper, his views of the medical treatment of the case by the physicians who attended, and especially his conviction that grave errors had been practiced by the adoption of the theories of Dr. Benjamin Rush favoring frequent and copious blood-letting. He thought that by a different treatment Washington's life would have been saved.

All these papers have been under my inspection, and have been read with interest and care, and I have urged that they should be published. But the surviving descendants have felt a reserve and aversion to publicity on the subject, which may be deplored, but must be respected.

Coming back now to the duel between Thornton and Conway, and its causes, we attend first upon a dining party, on the largest and richest basis, given by the Spotswood family soon after the close of the Revolutionary War, at their country seat, "Nottingham," on the Rappahannock. Many well-known guests were present. Among them were Mr. and Mrs. Thornton from their home on the north side of the river, Dr. Wellford from Fredericksburg, and Captain John Spotswood, who had been an officer in the American army, had been wounded and made prisoner at the battle of Brandywine, had been held for some time in Philadelphia, and had been restored to health by the skill and humanity of Dr. Wellford.

The dinner service was long, and abundant in the luxury and rich dishes so well known in Virginia. Some time after it was over Mr. and Mrs. Thornton set out on their return across the river to their home. Very soon after reaching their dwelling-house, Mr. Thornton was seized by a violent attack of illness, which racked him with acute pain, and was attended by alarming symptoms. Preparations were immediately made to send to Fredericksburg for a physician. But Mrs. Thornton, thinking it probable that Dr. Wellford had not yet left Nottingham, sent also a messenger to cross the river and urge him to come immediately to the bedside of Mr. Thornton. He came at once and did all that medical skill could do in the case. But all in vain. Mr. Thornton died early in the night.

Mr. and Mrs. Thornton had several children, among whom were a son, William Thornton, and a daughter, who became afterwards Mrs. Mary Carter. She was eminent for her devotion to Christian duty in the Presbyterian Church of Fredericksburg, of which she was long a member. About three years after Mrs. Thornton became a widow she was united in marriage to Dr. Wellford, and from this union came a family well and widely known and whose descendants are in Virginia to this day.

William Thornton and Francis F. Conway attained to mature manhood at nearly the same time. They were favorites in society and esteemed by both sexes. But unfortunately the tastes of each led them to seek in marriage the same lady. She was Miss Madison, but she was not the one who became Mrs. Lucy Conway and to whom Mr. Hayden in his interesting book on Virginia inaccurately attributes the role of the one loved by both. She was Miss Nellie Madison, a niece of President Madison, and who afterwards married Mr. Willis, of Gloucester County, and was the mother of Colonel John Willis, of Orange County. Colonel Willis' daughter became the wife of Hon. W. W. Scott, at present Librarian of Virginia.

Neither Mrs. Willis nor her son, Colonel Willis, would ever speak of nor permit themselves to be interrogated about the duel or its causes. They avoided it as painful beyond endurance.

Miss Nellie Madison was a frequent guest at the well-known country seat, "Chatham," opposite to Fredericksburg. There the two gentlemen, Thornton and Conway, often visited her, and sometimes their visits fell into the same evening. How much of jealous and conflicting feeling arose no man or woman save themselves ever knew.

On one night Conway had on his horse a new and very handsome bridle. By accident or intent, a servant put this bridle on Thornton's horse when the gentlemen were preparing to leave. This was a small matter and would not have led to a quarrel between them had not their spirits been alienated by a deeper cause. But the quarrel certainly took place and became so sharp that insulting words passed, and in a short time a challenge was sent and accepted.

The mortal field was again that even pathway at the foot of "Alum Spring Rock," not far from Fredericksburg. John Spotswood Wellford, a son of Dr. Robert Wellford, was second for his half-brother, William Thornton. At the words for fire both shots sounded almost simultaneously and bullets passed through the region of the bladder in each combatant. Thornton was able to ride back to Fredericksburg and to Dr. Wellford's house. On examining the wound the skilful surgeon immediately apprehended that it would be fatal. Thornton and Conway died nearly at the same time, the victims of an unchristian usage.

Two traditional beliefs have followed this sad duel with a persistency and show of evidence which render their historic truth very probable. One is that on the person of William Thornton after his death was found a miniature painting of Miss Madison. The other is that about that time Mrs. Philip Thornton (who was sister to Francis Fitzhugh Conway, and the mother of Mrs. John C. Stanard, of Orange County, grandmother of William G. Stanard

already noted herein) was the female head of the family with whom Mr. Conway was residing.

None of them had any knowledge or intimation of the impending duel. But on the morning of the fatal day Mrs. Conway came down to the breakfast table evidently agitated and distressed. When asked why this was, she stated that she had had a dream in which she vividly saw a man on a white horse hastening to the house, and that his message was that her son had been killed. And in the afternoon of the day in which she told her dream a messenger mounted on a white horse was seen riding to the house, and his message was the tidings of the field of death!

Notwithstanding all these dismal facts of duelling, the practice continued to hold sway in the minds of the men of Virginia. The next duel, connected with Fredericksburg, which calls for notice occurred in or about the year 1835. It was between Arthur A. Morson and Richard Randolph, both men of excellent families held in high esteem, and both members of the bar who had gained enviable reputation for learning and skill in their profession.

The words which caused this duel were spoken in open court in Fredericksburg. The wife of Mr. Morson was a daughter of Hon. John Scott, then one of the circuit judges of Virginia. Richard Randolph was not a resident of Fredericksburg or its neighborhood, but of one of the Piedmont counties. Yet his circle of practice embraced Fredericksburg. On the occasion which led to the duel, Mr. Randolph in oral argument commented, with caustic severity, upon a decision made by Judge Scott, adding words which might be construed as importing a reflection on his judicial competency. Mr. Morson rose and in the impressive yet deliberate manner which belonged to him, said that "the words which have been spoken and the source whence they came were alike contemptible." In later times of license probably an encounter with fists, heavy law books amid ink-stands scattering ink over innocent people's white vests and shirt fronts, would have followed. But in those days

the matter called only for a later and systematic hostile combat with deadly weapons.

The duel did not take place at the "Alum Spring Rock" nor anywhere in Virginia. The parties, with their seconds, met in the District of Columbia, not far from Washington City. Pistols were the weapons, fifteen paces the distance. And it was part of the understanding, either expressed or implied, that if either combatant chose to receive the fire of the other, without returning it, within the time of the formula, such combatant had the right to advance on the other, who might keep his stand or retreat, as he deemed best for his honor or his safety.

The events on the field were not detailed in the newspapers as is now the universal custom. People in those days were considered as having some rights of privacy and of freedom from visits by "interviewers." Not so now! But the facts were, in substance, made known.

Mr. Morson, within the time limit, fired and missed his opponent. Mr. Randolph, having reserved his fire, walked deliberately towards his adversary until probably less than half of the original distance separated them. He then said: "Am I contemptible now, sir?" Morson retained his place steadily, and looked Randolph in the face, but said not a word. Randolph then slowly raised his pistol until the muzzle pointed upward and fired into the air! This, of course, ended the duel. Neither was hurt, unless in conscience. It has been said that the duel was fought on Sunday morning.

Arthur A. Morson afterwards removed with his family to Richmond and practiced law there with success and growing reputation to the end of his life. I knew him well—was sometimes with him and sometimes against him in cases of importance in law and equity. He was, in every respect, a Virginia gentleman. Our residences were on Governor Street and near each other. When the "War Between the States" opened, he frequently conversed with me, and expressed apprehensions chiefly founded on Southern financial failure, and the danger to our Southern women

and their families arising from the destruction of their investments. But like many other true Southern men, who felt deep concern as to the result, his sympathies and efforts were all for the Southern cause.

He fell into invalid health and died before the war ended. I visited him and his family, and felt for them sincere friendship. I was much impressed by his request that the arrangements for his funeral should be as "inexpensive as practicable." He was far above all false pride. As one of his pallbearers I aided in the final services and attended his body to the grave.

The next event in the history of Virginia duelling is remarkable in two points: *first*, that the cause of the challenge was so trivial and inadequate that we have in the case an object lesson teaching the intrinsic folly of the practice; *second*, that though the challenge passed and was accepted, the seconds were chosen, the spot was selected, and all the preliminaries were arranged, the duel did not occur because of wise intervention by the power of the law.

I have already spoken of Robert W. Briggs and of the family from which he came. He was my cousin of the third degree. He was a young man of talent and much beloved and esteemed for his vivacity and wit. But these very qualities sometimes led him into discretions. In or about the year 1839 he was living in the family of Mr. and Mrs. William Beale, and was studying the science of law in the office and under the direction of Richard C. L. Moncure, who was then a practitioner but afterwards was raised to be associate judge, and finally president of the Supreme Court of Appeals of Virginia.

Robert W. Briggs paid a morning visit to two young ladies from Orange County who were then guests in a refined Fredericksburg family. In the lively conversation which took place a young gentleman from Orange, whose name, I think, was John Chapman, was casually mentioned. One of the ladies asked their visitor if he had met Mr. Chapman. He replied in words assuredly good humored

and jocular in spirit, and to the effect, that he had met Mr. Chapman, and that the impression made was that "he was a somewhat sentimental and Byronic youth."

These words were not intended to offer insult or offense. They ought not to have been repeated, and especially to the gentleman who was thus merrily designated. Their repetition was forbidden by Holy Writ in such passages as Proverbs 11:13, 18:8, 20:19, 26:20, 22; Leviticus 19:16; 1 Timothy 5:13. But hardly had these ladies returned to their homes before one or both of them had met Mr. Chapman and informed him of the circumstances and of the words and the person who spoke them.

Then immediately began "a tempest in a teapot." Chapman wrote to Briggs a letter complaining of the matter as insulting to him, and asking for such explanation or apology as ought to be satisfactory between gentlemen. Briggs promptly replied in writing. He came to see me on Commerce Street in Mr. Wallace's office, and after a brief account of the matter showed me Mr. Chapman's letter and his own reply, which was soon mailed.

I read both letters carefully, and although deeply concerned that a passing and merry remark should have already been the germ of a serious affair, I regarded Robert Briggs' letter as satisfactory, and that it ought to be so considered. In this letter all purpose of offense or insult to Mr. Chapman was disclaimed. The words spoken were intended only in a jocose way, and were applied only because when a gentleman exhibited, in public, words and qualities which entitled him to the designation of "sentimental and Byronic" he had no right to complain, if truth was spoken.

But Mr. Chapman was not satisfied, and in a short time sent another letter, which was in spirit and form a challenge to a duel. On its receipt Robert Briggs came again to see me and told me of the cartel and that he would accept its challenge and meet Mr. Chapman in a duel with pistols. I was then only about nineteen years old, and felt deep concern and embarrassment as to what I ought to do. That

a cause so utterly trivial as to approach the ridiculous should subject two promising young men to the risk of violent death, and that in the case of one of them his death would deprive a widowed mother and her daughters of one to whom they looked for love and help seemed to me unendurable. And yet I knew well that any effectual intervention on my part would subject both my cousin and myself to insinuations which, however unjust, would have been wounding and injurious.

Thus the preparations went forward. The place for the intended duel was in Stafford County, about seven miles from Fredericksburg. The pistols were approved, the seconds ready, a medical officer of the United States Navy had promised that, though he could not agree to attend on the ground as surgeon, he would visit some patients in the vicinity of the chosen spot and be in the neighborhood in time.

But Samuel Greenhow Daniel, by a prompt move, effectually stopped the duel. He knew that it was close at hand. He knew the cause, and the facts, and afterwards stated that if the matter had had a just and solid foundation instead of resting upon a folly, he would not have interfered. He was a well-known lawyer, a member and officer in the Presbyterian Church, and a man of high character. He made the needed affidavit, and a warrant issued to arrest all the parties. They were carried before a justice of the peace, who heard all the evidence and decided that the two principals and their seconds should be bound over to keep the peace and be of good behavior for a year. The penalty of the bond was quite high, but adequate sureties were readily found. The parties were released, and this affair, absurd in origin yet grave in threatened consequences, was ended.

During the period of twenty-six years in which I practiced in law and equity in the City of Richmond, Virginia, a number of duels took place between persons residing in the city or casually there. They were generally caused by

words of insult or offense originating in the debates of partisan politics, and few of them resulted in death or wounds. Only three of them seem to call for special mention.

The fatal encounter between John Hampden Pleasants, editor of the "Whig" newspaper, and Thomas Ritchie, Jr., the youngest editor of the "Enquirer," occurred in or about the year 1845. A subject of controversy between "Whigs" and "Democrats" had arisen and had led to a protracted discussion in the editorial columns of both papers. This grew in sharpness and vehemence until it led to a crisis. The veteran, Thomas Ritchie, had complied with the invitation of President James K. Polk, and had taken the editorial seat with its influence and profits previously enjoyed by Blair and Rives in Washington City. Had he remained in Richmond it was thought by many that the tragedy would not have occurred.

William F. Ritchie, the senior brother and editor of the "Enquirer," maintained his side of the discussion with ability and dignity. John Hampden Pleasants, on his side, wrote with finest rhetoric and power which made a strong impression on all who read the articles on both sides. Suddenly this legitimate and spirited exchange of editorials was brought to a close by a brief article in the "Enquirer" of probably not more than twenty lines signed "Thomas Ritchie, Jr." I remember well with how much of surprise and regret I read it, and I believe these feelings were sympathized in by many. It did not pretend to continue the discussion, but, after some allusions to it, ended with a definite assertion that John Hampden Pleasants was "a coward."

Of course, this could have had only one purpose, and that was to stop the discussion in the field of thought and intellect, and point to the field of blood. Yet Pleasants was so well known as a Virginia gentleman of courage and honor that he might, by a high editorial in a style to which

he was fully equal, have triumphed. But he yielded to an impulse to prove by arms the injustice of the insult.

He wrote a letter to Thomas Ritchie, Jr., to the effect that on a morning close at hand and designated in date, at an hour early after dawn, he would be on the canal bank of the cotton factories in Manchester, armed with body small arms and that if Mr. Ritchie met him then and there, he should have an opportunity to ascertain whether he (Pleasants) was a coward.

When this unfortunate missive was received Ritchie conferred with his second and other friends, and returned a written reply protesting against the mode of combat proposed because it was unusual and unsanctioned by the "code of honor," and because it would exclude the application of rules needful for both parties, and because it tended to an encounter irregular, bloody and barbarous. The writing closed with the statement that, notwithstanding the protest, Ritchie would be on the ground designated and at the appointed time.

Soon after dawn of the fatal morning, the parties and their seconds were on the level roadway of the canal; but the groups were at a considerable distance apart. Thomas Deane, a merchant of high standing, and a whole-hearted man well acquainted with all the parties, had come also on the ground. He announced that he did not come to take any part except that of friend and peacemaker. He urged that the expected combat should not go forward; that all should withdraw from the field to Richmond with the earnest hope that honorable concessions and apologies should be made and peace attained. To this Washington Greenhow, second for Ritchie, replied that "no concessions could be made, that he had had his man on the field for more than fifteen minutes, and that at the end of fifteen minutes more he would withdraw him unless the combat had commenced."

Thus all efforts for a peaceful settlement failed. All save the principals withdrew from the expected line of fire. Pleasants was armed with sword-cane and pistols; Ritchie

with pistols and his artillery cutlass, he being an officer in the Fayette artillery. Pleasants advanced steadily on his adversary, Ritchie did not advance, and his standing position gave him advantages in aim. The firing commenced when they were about twenty paces apart. Pleasants was struck by several bullets in vital parts of his body. Ritchie received no wound, and when Mr. Pleasants was very near him with drawn sword cane, Thomas Scott, who, though not a second, had come as a friend of Mr. Ritchie, and had sheltered himself behind a tree in the rear, called to him: "Tom, drop your pistol and draw your cutlass!" But 'ere he reached his combatant, Mr. Pleasants fell to the ground.

He was conveyed to his dwelling, and the best surgical and medical aid attended him. Dr. Francis H. Deane, brother of Thomas Deane, was much attached to Mr. Pleasants. I saw him a short time after he left the bedside of his wounded friend. He could hardly speak so much was he moved. But he told me he had no hope whatever that Pleasants would recover and his fears were realized. Mr. Pleasants died the next day.

A cloud of deep sadness and grief hung over a large part of the people of Richmond. Men who had been somewhat estranged from the eminent editor because of his trenchant pen now hurried to offer sympathy and aid to his widow and fatherless children.

It had been deemed prudent that Thomas Ritchie, Jr., and his second should, for a time, leave Virginia. While they were absent an editorial eminently thoughtful and appropriate appeared in the "Enquirer" expressing deep regret for what had occurred, and stating that the junior editor and his friend would soon return and stand a trial in the Circuit Court of Chesterfield County, the preliminaries for which were already in progress.

They would rest confidently on the ground of self-defense.

They returned, surrendered themselves and were speedily brought to trial. Skilful lawyers defended them, the leader of whom was the late Samuel Taylor, a native of

Chesterfield County, but long a resident of Richmond, and with whom I was well acquainted. Chesterfield had a large Democratic population and it was natural enough that the jurors, finally empaneled under the law, should have been Democrats. The trial occupied two days. The evidence was very fully presented, the case was eloquently argued, and the jury, after a short retirement, returned a verdict of "not guilty." In a conversation with him afterwards Mr. Taylor said to me, with a somewhat significant twinkle of his eye, that the jury were quite prepared to render such a verdict even before they heard any of the evidence.

Mr. Pleasants left a son, James, and a daughter, Ann Eliza, both of whom became members of the Second Presbyterian Church in Richmond under the pastorate of Rev. Dr. Moses D. Hoge. I became well acquainted with them, and esteemed them highly. James prepared himself for the bar, and practiced for many years in Richmond with definite success. He was not reckoned as a successful speaker and advocate, but as a clear-headed and well informed lawyer. Ann Eliza became the second wife of Douglas H. Gordon, of Baltimore, who was one of the children of the rich Bazil Gordon, of Falmouth, already noted herein. Douglas Gordon was a well educated and skilful man of business and financier. Amid all the storms and dangers to investments of the "War Between the States," he kept the helm of the ship, holding his own means and those of his relatives and friends. His instincts of finance led him to rely chiefly on mortgages on real estate, and on first mortgage railroad bonds, and many of these escaped wreck after the war. He is believed to have substantially helped his brother-in-law, James Pleasants, by advice and by pointing the way to profitable investments.

James Pleasants became independent and comfortable in his circumstances. He had had the good fortune, before the war, to marry his first cousin, Miss Massie, of the University region in Albemarle County. No children were born to them, but Mrs. Pleasants was a handsome and at-

tractive lady who became a favorite in Richmond society. Her "pink-teas" were special occasions of refined enjoyment after the war closed.

Mr. Pleasants' health failed some time before his death. He was compelled to abandon his practice and to retire with his wife to a rural home in Albemarle above Charlottesville, which he had acquired by purchase. Here he died only a few years ago. He was trusted and loved by those who knew him best.

LEONARD PLUKENETT TO WILLIAM BYRD I.*

Sr

Dr. Lister was with me yesterday to acquaint me with the sense of his misfortune in not being in the way to have kiss'd yor hands at the particular obligation of yor visit.

* This is a draft of a letter, Sloane 4067 fo. 105, British transcripts in the Library of Congress, written by Leonard Plukenett to William Byrd I. The endorsement "To Colnl Byrd a little before he went to Virginia" is the chief clue to the date. Col. Byrd was in England from the spring of 1687 to the spring of 1688. Plukenett was born in 1642 and died in 1706. He was a distinguished botanist of the time, being appointed by Queen Mary Superintendent of the Royal Gardens at Hampton Court, with the title of Royal Professor of Botany or Queen's Botanist. The letter is of interest as showing the relation of William Byrd I to distinguished scientists in London, who sought from him specimens of minerals, insects and plants. The Doctor Lister referred to was Martin Lister, M. D., 1638-1712, an eminent physician and zoologist, author of *Historia sive Synopsis Methodica Conchyliorum* 1685-92. Samuel Doody was a well-known botanist of the period, intimate with Ray, Plukenett, Petiver and Sloane. John Banister was a minister of the Church of England. He was living in Charles City County, Virginia, as early as 1678. He was a correspondent of Ray, Martin Lister and Compton, Bishop of London. Banister prepared a list of Virginia plants which was published in Volume 2 of Ray's *Historia Plantarum*. Banister was also an entomologist. It is believed that his death occurred in 1692. His collection of plants is now in the British Museum. Col. Byrd received attention when on this journey to England from Jacob Bobert, the younger, keeper of the botanical gardens at Oxford. (See *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography*, Volume 25, p. 255.)