CHAPTER I

Fredericksburg, its People and its History — Traditions of George Washington and of the Lees — Anecdotes of Other Famous Men, and Quaint Characters of the Town — Country Homes of the Gentry — General Lafayette's Visit — The Maury Family — Social Life before the War — The Generous Hospitality of the Old Days

FREDERICKSBURG, Virginia, is one of the historic towns of America. Founded long before the Revolution, upon the Rappahannock River, at the head of tide-water, it commanded for many years the trade of the opulent planters of all that fertile region lying along the Potomac and Rappahannock rivers from the Blue Ridge Mountains to the Chesapeake Bay. The town was the centre of the commercial and social life of that rich region known as the Northern Neck of Virginia and the Piedmont country, where were born and bred the great Fathers of American liberty. In my boyhood there were many there who had walked and talked with John Marshall, George Washington, George Mason, Thomas Jefferson, James Madison, James Monroe, and the Lees.

For more than a century prior to the Revolution, the sturdy people of that region were often engaged in active war with the great Indian nation once ruled by King Powhatan. In the rebellion of Nathaniel Bacon against Sir William Berkeley two centuries ago, several thousand horsemen marched under his command to assert those principles of popular rights which were proclaimed and

established in 1776. Many of these soldiers were from Fredericksburg and its vicinity, and it was inevitable that the descendants of these men should be the very first to arm against the encroachments of the British crown, and it was in Fredericksburg that a convention of delegates of twelve companies of horse assembled and, proclaiming their purpose to defend the colony of Virginia, or any other colony, against the king of England, marched, under the command of Patrick Henry, against Lord Dunmore in his capital. This occurred twenty-one days before the famous Declaration of Mecklenburg, and was therefore the first and most emphatic declaration of our independence. In 1782, when that independence had been accomplished, it was a citizen of Fredericksburg who introduced into the Legislature, which had then replaced the House of Burgesses, the first resolution for the emancipation of the negroes, and for the prohibition of the slave trade, ever offered in America. General John Minor, who had fought throughout the war, was the author and advocate of the measure.

George Washington had his boyhood's home in Fredericksburg, and after his public career ended he used to go there to visit his venerable mother. His arrival was the occasion of great conviviality and rejoicing. Dinner parties and card parties were then in order, and we find, in that wonderful record of his daily receipts and expenditures, that on one of these occasions he won thirty guineas at loo. Probably it was after this night that he threw the historic dollar across the river, the only instance of extravagance ever charged against him. A dinner party was usually given to him on his arrival at the old Indian Queen Tavern, where, tradition tells us, drink was deep and play was high.

It is generally believed that Washington did not laugh

or enjoy a joke. I have often heard Judge Francis Taliaferro Brooke, for many years Chief Justice of Virginia, say this was not true. Washington often dined at Smithfield, the home of the Brooke family. It is now known in the histories of the battle of Fredericksburg as the "Pratt House." Judge Brooke used to tell of a dinner given to Washington at the Indian Queen Tavern, at which he was present. A British officer sang a comic song, — a very improper song, but as funny as it was improper, — at which Washington laughed till the tears ran down his cheeks, and called upon the singer to repeat it.

The Lees frequented Fredericksburg, and Light Horse Harry was once in prison bounds there for debt. It is related that from the jail of that town he wrote to his old friend Robert Morris about his sad case, and asked him to accommodate him with a loan. The great financier replied that he was "very sorry he could not oblige him, because he, too, was in the same condition"! Our greater Lee, Robert Edward, used to make his summer home at Chatham, that old, colonial house just opposite Fredericksburg, then the residence of Fitzhugh. Stratford, where Lee was born, lies on the Potomac, near Wakefield, the birthplace of Washington. Mrs. Lee found the place too unhealthy for summer residence, and moved, with her children, up to the purer air of Chatham. The estate of Chatham adjoined the land of Mrs. Washington, where her son George broke the colt and barked the cherry tree.

Early in this century, General John Minor lived in the fine old house of Hazel Hill. He was one of the leading gentlemen of his day, and was remarkable for his benevolence and generosity. William Wirt paid high and eloquent tribute to General Minor's consideration for the young lawyers who were struggling up in the

profession. His negro butler was named Josephus, and was commonly called Joe. Joe had a son whom he named "Jimsephus." General Minor manumitted him, after he had been educated and had been taught the trade of printer, and he was sent to Liberia, where for many years Mr. James Sephas was the able editor of the Liberia *Herald*.

In the fierce struggle between the Federal and States-rights parties General Minor ran for Congress against James Monroe, then a resident of the town. Monroe beat him, but it made no difference in the personal relations of these high gentlemen. General Minor named a son after James Monroe, and Dr. James Monroe Minor entered the Navy as a surgeon. He married into the Pierrepont family of New York, where he became eminent in his profession.

On one occasion, the general went into a shoe store, and found a bright-looking country girl in sharp controversy with the merchant over a pair of shoes. Pleased with the girl's intelligence, he purchased the shoes and gave them to her. On the next Valentine's Day he received this: —

> "If these few lines you do accept,
> A pair of shoes I shall expect.
> If these few lines you do refuse,
> I shall expect a pair of shoes."

She got the shoes. The distinguished law teacher of the University of Virginia, Professor John Minor, is the general's nephew and namesake.

Many of our people advocated negro emancipation and colonization. My grandfather, Mr. Fontaine Maury, manumitted his slaves, and had one of them, a bright young fellow, educated for the law. He was sent to

Liberia, where he became the highly respected Judge Draper, of Monrovia. President Monroe, then a lawyer in Fredericksburg, was the great advocate of the emancipation and colonization of the negro. The capital of Liberia was named in his honor, Monrovia. Henry Clay, from the neighboring county of Hanover, was also the champion of emancipation, and president of the colonization society.

Commodore Matthew Fontaine Maury also made his home in Fredericksburg, where he married the sister of Captain William Lewis Herndon, that captain who commanded the *Central America* on her last, ill-fated voyage, and who, after he had placed all the women and children and as many as possible of the men passengers safely in the boats, refused, himself, to follow, because he would not desert his sinking ship. Dressing himself in his full uniform, he took his place upon the bridge, and as the vessel sank into the waves, her captain passed, with bowed and uncovered head, into the presence of his Maker.

It was many years prior to this that some good ladies of the town discovered a boy of about ten years in the act of climbing the lightning-rod of old Saint George's steeple to the cross above it. They publicly prophesied that the boy would never come to any good, and doubtless remembered him in their prayers; and these prevailed, for, long afterward, our country was deeply moved by the thrilling story of the Darien expedition, — of how it wandered, lost in the forests of Panama, many perishing, and of how the survivors owed their safety to this same hero, whose courage and self-devotion made the name of Jack Maury loved and honored forever.

The Honorable Samuel Southard, once Secretary of the Navy, married and lived for a time in Fredericks-

burg. To his kindness many of our boys owed their commissions in the Navy. A nephew of his by marriage was Jim Harrow, noted for his pugnacity. Jim was a member of the company which marched, in the beginning of the war, to defend Acquia Creek against the United States steamer *Pawnee*. Whenever the *Pawnee* would fire a shot, Jim Harrow would jump upon the parapet, and flap his arms and crow like a chicken cock. He also showed his contempt for the enemy by going beyond the works, and finally took his stand by a persimmon tree outside. A shot from the *Pawnee* struck the tree and cut it down, and Jim Harrow disappeared from view, enveloped in the smoke and dust and *débris* of the explosion. An old cannoneer exclaimed, "Thank God, that infernal fool is dead at last!" The words were scarcely uttered when there was a movement among the branches of the tree, and Jim Harrow emerged, rolling up his sleeves, and calling upon the man who had "thanked God he was dead" to come out, that he might lick him. Three years later, Jim's fights were ended by a Confederate deserter whom he attempted to arrest.

Mrs. Little, a lady of high culture and excellence, presided over the Academy to which the best people of the town and neighboring counties sent their daughters for education. An old planter of the Northern Neck took his darling daughter there. One of Mrs. Little's scholars was a Miss Richardetta H., whose name in the school was inevitably abbreviated to "Dick." The newcomer was enraptured with all her surroundings, and wrote home eloquently about the charms of her roommate, Dick H. Her father was astounded. He had heard much of the high character of Mrs. Little's school. He had also a fearful apprehension of the snares which

might be set for a young creature just from the seclusion of her country home, thrown at once into the fashionable vortex of the city of Fredericksburg. So he ordered out his carriage, and posted up to town, to take prompt measures about this business. He found Dick H. a gentle, refined girl, worthy of her distinguished family. She still lives, and is the wife of a prominent ex-general of the Confederacy.

Colonel Byrd Willis was one of the famous characters of his day. Connected with the most influential families of the State, he was the noted wit and *raconteur* of that old town. Weighing over three hundred pounds, he might have played Falstaff without the padding, and in his geniality and kindness equalled Shakespeare's masterpiece. The charming Princess Achille Murat was his daughter. She was an ornament of the court of the third Emperor, and was always the invited guest of the fashionable watering-places of Virginia. After breaking up his home in Florida, Colonel Willis returned to end his days in Fredericksburg. He paid liberally for his board to his landlady, a decayed gentlewoman and kinswoman, of great piety, but ate his meals at the best restaurant; for he enjoyed the pleasures of the table, and old Mrs. Carter's poverty and unthrift were great. He used to tell, how, one day, all of her resources being exhausted, the old lady took to her bed, saying to her housekeeper, "Nancy, there's nothing in the house but mush for dinner. Give that to my boarders. If they are Christians, they will eat it and be thankful; if they are not Christians, it is much better than they deserve."

About 1795 Robert Brooke, governor of Virginia, built his home upon Federal Hill, which looks over Sandy Bottom to Marye's Heights, a thousand yards away. Early in this century, Governor Brooke being dead, Fed-

eral Hill became the property of the family of Cobb, since of Georgia. Governor Cobb, of Georgia, and his brother, General Sylvanus Cobb, lived there as boys. In the great battle a Federal battery was placed on the lawn of Federal Hill. General Sylvanus Cobb, for the first time since his boyhood, looked again upon his old home from the stone wall at the foot of Marye's Heights. It was the last time he ever saw it, for a cannon-ball from that battery tore him to pieces.

For many years Mr. Reuben Thom was the postmaster of the town. He was also senior warden of Saint George's Church. Scarcely five feet in stature, he was of heroic nature. Once when the Episcopal Convention was assembled in Saint George's, a dangerous crack was discovered in the gallery of the church, and great apprehension prevailed as to the safety of the building. The senior warden indignantly derided these fears, and, when the convention opened, the amazed congregation saw their warden seated in the gallery, his arms folded, and his back propping the dangerous crack.

He was a man of strictest integrity and absolute sobriety, and was never known to take a drop of strong drink; but his ruddy face was adorned by a prominent nose of flaming and suspicious redness. One day, while admonishing the mail-carrier of King George County because of his tippling propensities, he was silenced by being requested to look at his own nose before he ventured to talk to other people about drinking.

During the bombardment of the town, the old man, then an octogenarian, had his arm-chair moved out into the garden, the nearest place to the cannon of the enemy, and there he sat throughout the day, encouraging by word and example the terrified people of his flock.

It was in 1826 that General Lafayette visited our town,

and was received and entertained with great enthusiasm as he passed on his way to Yorktown. The Fredericksburg Guards escorted him to his destination.[1] One of my earliest recollections is of a pair of white morocco shoes with a portrait of General Lafayette on the instep. This country owes more to that truly noble Frenchman than we ever think of now, and France always found him, in every crisis, a brave and faithful patriot.

While General Lafayette was in Fredericksburg, one of his old soldiers of the Revolution came to town to pay his respects to his former commander. He had a profound conviction of the activity and prevalence of pickpockets, and from the time he entered the streets of the city kept his hand upon his watch. Finally he succeeded, after passing through the crowd, in reaching his general. In his enthusiasm at being greeted so warmly by the great marquis, he seized, with both hands, Lafayette's friendly grasp, and as he turned away clapped his hand again upon his watch pocket, but, alas, it was empty.

Later on I have seen John Randolph's coach with four thoroughbreds, and John and Jubah in attendance, draw up at the Farmers' Hotel; and in the summer season ten coaches at once would drive from that old tavern to the White Sulphur. It was said that one team of thoroughbred sorrels made Chancellor's Tavern, ten miles away, in one hour.

Six miles below Fredericksburg on Massaponox Creek was New Post, the home of General Alexander Spottswood. Great intimacy was cherished between the families of Brooke of Smithfield and Spottswood. Young

[1] Colonel Charles Pollard, the great railroad benefactor of Alabama, and most distinguished of all her great citizens for his munificent, pure, and exalted life, was a lieutenant of the escort of General Lafayette on his famous excursion to Yorktown.

Francis Taliaferro Brooke married a daughter of General Spottswood, and their home at Saint Julian, just a mile away, was for many years one of the most charming in the State.

Saint Julian, as I remember it, was one of the most delightful of the many country homes of that fair region. It was seven miles below Fredericksburg, on the right of the main stage road to Richmond, situated in a lovely valley embowered in fine old shade trees, and surrounded by acres of choice fruits and flowers. The vegetable garden was closely guarded by a cedar hedge which a cat could hardly penetrate, while away to the left stretched a meadow bordered by a clear running brook, a tributary of the Massaponox, along which my brother and I, escorted by old John, the carriage driver, used to hunt, with old Orion, a black and white pointer, to help us. A generation later Jackson's infantry and Pelham's guns thundered along that stream until its waters ran red with human blood.

Here my uncle, Frank Brooke, made his home for many years, and my brother and I were ever most welcome guests. Aunt Brooke was a Miss Mary Carter, a beauty of Blenheim, in Albemarle County, and was the most exquisite of Virginia hostesses. Rarely have I enjoyed a table so dainty as hers, with its old blue India china, and handsome silver and napery. Every dish had been the especial care of old Phyllis, the best cook on the Rappahannock. The walls of the parlor were covered by old-fashioned landscape paper, depicting the adventures and death of Captain Cook. Over the mantel hung a portrait of my great-grandfather, Mr. Richard Brooke, in his scarlet coat, buff waistcoat, and lace ruffles, and over the door the portrait of the beautiful Miss Fannie Carter, a famous belle of her day, who married Rosier

Dulany, kinsman of the Colonel Dick Dulany, so well known and loved in Virginia, and so distinguished in the army of northern Virginia for his lofty bearing, gentle nature, and daring courage.

But the charm of Saint Julian was our cousin Helen. Lovely in person and in character, she was the belle of the county, and of Richmond too. She was a little older than I, and her refined, high-bred nature made her my divinity, and she knew it too. Aunt Brooke had a niece, Mary Francis Thompson, whom she adopted as a chosen companion for Helen. She was a sweet, gentle girl, and my brother and she were sweethearts, and when last at Saint Julian on a furlough from the army, I saw on the bark of an aspen tree the big heart carved by my brother, with her initials and his own within it. They had both been dead many years then. When the enemy came to Saint Julian the old family portraits were all carried to Fredericksburg, and stored in the post-office in the care of Mr. Reuben Thom. In the bombardment of the town they were destroyed.

They were a very happy and united family, those Brookes of Saint Julian. In his youth Uncle Frank used to hunt foxes with General Spottswood, and it was after he came home from the Revolutionary War, where he had served on General Greene's staff, that he married Mary Spottswood. He had been her neighbor and lover all his boyhood. After her death, he married Mary Carter. He became a great lawyer, and was for more than forty years on the Supreme Bench, — the Court of Appeals of Virginia. Henry Clay read law in his office, and on his way to Congress used to stop at Saint Julian. Judge Brooke lived to be more than eighty years of age. He lies by his wife in the little graveyard on the hill above their home. The family are all scattered now or dead,

and the dear old place has passed into other hands. It has become the property of Mr. Boulware, a very well-known and respected Virginian. It is a comfort to me that gentle people are there, for it is the dearest place in all my boyhood's memories.

Johnson Barbour, son of our distinguished governor, was one of the most brilliant youths of his day, as he has been for many years the highest illustration of our cultured country gentleman. When about sixteen years of age he was a visitor in our home in Fredericksburg. He had been to England with his father when he was our Minister to the Court of St. James, and the versatility and readiness of his talk made a great impression upon all of us, especially upon myself, who felt his superiority to any boy I had ever seen. We were bedfellows during his visit, and one night I, wakeful and much impressed by Johnson's cleverness during the evening, requested him to examine me on matters of general information. He complied, and sleepily inquired how many children Queen Elizabeth had. I gave it up, and the catechism ended, for Johnson rolled over and went to sleep.

I have recorded these personal anecdotes to illustrate the character of the community in which our people were reared. It was a blessed and happy land in my boyhood and youth. All of the rich bottom lands of the Rappahannock were occupied by prosperous planters, whose ample estates, with their spacious residences, had descended for generations from father to son. Many of these were granted by the Crown of England, but very few are now held under the original grants. The repeal of the law of entail, brought about by Mr. Jefferson, was so recent, that in some families the homes were inherited by the sons, while the daughters were otherwise provided for. These homes were then the abode of very great

comfort and dignity; a generous and elegant hospitality was universal. The house servants were long and carefully trained in their respective duties, and oftentimes remained for generations in the same families. My children's nurse, "Mammy Lucy," and her progenitors, had been in the family of my father-in-law for five generations, and remained till the Emancipation Proclamation. The usual retinue of the establishment at "Cleveland," my wife's home, was fifteen servants, or more when the house was full of company; and as many as thirty or more of the family and friends daily dined there together for weeks and months at a time.

In Fredericksburg and its near vicinity lived many Scotch families. Every historic name of Scotland is represented among them, and a more worthy class of people can nowhere be found. Their ancestors came over in colonial days, and, curiously enough, became Episcopalians, as were all the population of that region in those days. The history and traditions of the people made them proud, and the religious and literary influences were of a high order. The old College of William and Mary was the Alma Mater of these colonial gentry, while the classical academies of Hanson, and Lawrence, and the Colemans prepared our youth for their higher education there. Following the English system, the study of the classics was the chief aim of these schools. Modern languages were not taught in them, nor mathematics to any valuable extent.