

AN AUTOBIOGRAPHIC STUDY regarding THE LOWNDES FAMILY, BY GEORGE HENRY CALVERT OF RIVERSDALE, PRINCE GEORGES COUNTY, MARYLAND

Sent to William Lowndes by Shirley V. Baltz

The Lowndes family were our nearest and dearest neighbors. How distinctly I remember the tall, large, straight, easy figure of Mr. Lowndes in his small-clothes and long stockings. To call him a gentleman of the old school were to do him injustice. With this phrase are associated formality; his politeness was not a superficial product of social culture, it came from within and had the attractiveness of cordial amenity. In the expression of his countenance were married benignity and thoughtfulness, and the broad prominence of his upper forehead told that his thoughtfulness tended to tranquil meditation rather than to busy doing. And he was happily mated. Mrs. Lowndes, a sister of Governor Lloyd, the largest land owner and wheat grower in Maryland - had a tall, full figure. In her voice and features kindness and good will found a favorite abiding-place. Vividly present to me is her gracious image with her sweet motherly welcome; her household sceptre, a bunch of keys hanging at her side. Into their four children passed the bodily and mental comeliness of the parents. The elder son, Edward, my comrade, died young. The eldest daughter, Elizabeth, married the Rev. William Pinkney, the present distinguished Bishop of Maryland, nephew of the great lawyer William Pinkney. The younger daughter, Anne, remained single from choice. Of this estimable, lovable family the only survivor is the youngest, Benjamin Ogle Lowndes, who with his brother-in-law, the Bishop, resides at Blenheim the family-seat, which stand on a hill overlooking the village of Bladensburg and a wide extent of country westward.

The Christian charity of Mr. Lowndes shone in a rare light about the year 1814. A member of Congress from the city of New York, an utter stranger to Mr. Lowndes and his family, was badly wounded by a fellow-member on the famous dueling-ground of Bladensburg. Mr. Lowndes took the wounded man to his house, and there he was tenderly nursed until recovery. Contrasted with the light in the conduct of Mr. Lowndes was the shade in that of the wounded Congressman. After he quitted the hospitable house where disinterested brotherly tending had probably saved his life, there never came from him a kind of grateful recognition, or any line, to the family at Blenheim.

Beside Dr. Fitzgerald and his sister, and brother and sister of Mr. Lowndes, an important member of the social circle of Bladensburg seventy years ago was Benjamin Stoddart, who had been a member of the Cabinet of President John Adams. The day after the news reached Bladensburg of the Baltimore mob (in which a number of federalists were beaten and bruised and wounded, and one, General Ligon, was killed), Mr. Stoddart rode over to Riversdale. My father met him on the steps. The earnest indignation of the two staunch federalists impressed itself strongly on me.

One other family in the village was entitled to entrance into the charmed circle; but the head of it, a gentleman of the well-known Bowie race, was a democrat, and in those days of excited party-spirit federalists and democrats did not interchange dinner-invitations. I never passed the Bowie house without feeling a perverse curiosity to see the inside of it.

Another gentleman, owner of a large estate two miles west of the village, almost forfeited his rightful social place by a fatal partiality to one house in Bladensburg. The inheritor of wealth and of a noted English name, a man of education, gentle manners and good dispositions, he yielded to the animal fascination of the demon, drink, spending his time clearly at the village tavern, where he drowned his body and estate in whiskey.

The federalists made the most of the Baltimore mob. They got up an imposing demonstration. Numerous delegates from the city of Baltimore and from each county of the State met at Georgetown, D.C. and marched in procession to the "Heights." Here was displayed the tent used by Washington in the Revolutionary War, and a oration was delivered by the step-grandson and adopted son of Washington, G.W.P. Custis, of Arlington. My father being one of the delegates, I witnessed advantageously the whole proceeding. The procession was to have been escorted by a volunteer military company of Georgetown; but just as it was about to move, came spurring across the bridge between Washington and Georgetown General Van Ness, commander of the District militia, and a home democrat. Galloping up to the enranked company (he was a large man in a green coat), he ordered it to disband. The captain (probably a fiery federalist) broke his sword across his knee.