

## A Short History of My Life and Times

### The Preface

I undertook the task of writing the following account at the request of my daughter Marcia. She expressed the wish for a record of my memories of near relations and the ancestors I've so often spoken of to her and to her children. It is my purpose in the pages that follow that they may come to know them as they lived and as they still live in my memory of and my love for them. It is my hope that as I tell their story you, as well as others of their descendants, may make their personal acquaintance which you could not make at first hand due to time and their morality. It is my further hope that all of you who read this and all that follows, now or in years to come, may find something of interest and pleasure in that acquaintance which I have earnestly endeavored to establish.

As the history that follows this preface is about myself as well as other, I exercised the right to express...in part...some...of my opinions and beliefs. I expressed them for the purpose that all of you might know me better, as they accentuate some of my angry and violent reactions to conditions existing at this point in my life and times. Yes, I am a reactionary.

I believe as you read the chapters that follow you will agree that I made no attempt to minimize...some...of my faults and shortcomings. I have avoided putting forward any claim of virtue and wisdom on my own behalf. If in any of my opinions you find me offensive, forgive me. If certain of my beliefs are heretical, correct me. If you find me guilty of sin and error, pray for me. One last favor I ask of all of you who read this and all that follows, is that you love me, as I love you.

Samuel Richard Eskridge

# A Short History of My Life and Times

by Samuel Richard Eskridge

## Chapter One

At the outset I will relate that I arrived on this planet on the nineteenth day of December in the year of our Lord eighteen hundred and ninety-nine, in the state of Mississippi, county of Lafayette, in beat five about a mile and a half from the diminutive village of Delay. The name of the village did not stem from any procrastination on the part of the little community or its inhabitants, but was named for a captain John Delay. He was, to the best of my knowledge, and if my memory is correct, a hero of the Revolutionary War. Whatever his fame, the little community was named in his honor. I do know that the officer and gentleman named above is buried in the cemetery in Oxford, which is the county seat of Lafayette County and home of the University of Mississippi.

In the interest of strict truth I admit that I do not remember the event of my birth, but I have legal documentary proof that I was born at the time and in the place as stated above. I was the first born and first son of James Clarence Eskridge and James Phoebe Nona Lynch, his wife whom he adored. That I was most fortunate to have been born to such parents is my belief. I have taken great pride in my parents all the days of my life up to this moment and I will continue to be proud of them while life shall last.

Subsequently born to my parents were my brothers and a sister: James Laurel Eskridge, Clarence Wade Hobson Eskridge, and our sister Sarah Catherine Ragland Eskridge, and in the order named. A fifth child, a son, was born dead in the year nineteen hundred and eighteen. My parents gave him the name William Lynch Eskridge. My mother had influenza in the terrible epidemic of that year. It was my mother affliction with that terrible disease that caused the still birth of that, her last child and son, said her doctor. Many other mothers suffered that same misfortune during that epidemic.

I believe that the time and place of my birth and the fact that we lived on the land and in the house of my grandfather and grandmother Lynch<sup>1</sup> contributed in no small measure to the happiness of my parents and our whole family during that period. It was on that place and in that house, I lived through the greater part of childhood and adolescence. My early, indeed, my first memories are of that house and its near surroundings. The first remembered events of my life occurred in that place.

Before proceeding further with this narrative of the people concerned, I will describe as best as I'm able the beauty of the great trees that grew about that house and its near surroundings, in those days so long ago.

Gran'Pa built that house for his home and for Gran'Ma, ready and waiting for her when he brought her there as his bride. They selected the site for the house during their courtship. They both had an appreciation for natural beauty and each of them possessed the character and the rare good judgment to preserve it. They built their house without destroying any of the great trees that stood all about it. To appreciate the remarkable quality of that unusual pair you must remember that Gran'Ma was not quite sixteen and Gran'Pa lacked a few days to his nineteenth

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<sup>1</sup>James Thomas Lynch and Sarah Catherine Ragland Lynch

birthday when they were married.<sup>2</sup>

A very large white oak stood in the front yard within ten feet of the front porch providing welcome shade spring and summer. Just a few paces beyond the oak tree were two cedars, large ones, providing additional deep shade and filling all the air with the aromatic fragrance of their thick dark green foliage. Also in the front yard [stood] a catalpa tree with large leaves of light green and very long beans. Their only use, the beans, so far as I knew, was for seed if someone wished to plant a catalpa tree. It was my favorite for climbing when I was a young boy.

Allow me to pause here for a little while in my efforts in description to discuss another crop that tree produced upon occasion...worms! As fishing was one of Gran'Ma's favorite pastimes and as I found great pleasure in sharing in her diversion and delighted in her company, we both welcomed that bounty of worms because of their effectiveness as fish bait. We never failed to bring home a long string of fish when we had those worms for bait. It is my considered opinion that it was for "Sally" that Gran'Pa planted that tree. He always called her "Sally" when he was in good humor which was almost always, but if he was as he termed it 'vexed' he would call her "Sarah". To my knowledge he never went fishing so I'm a great deal more than just ordinarily sure that it was for my Gran'Ma and his "Sally" that he provided that tree. Although it was not as large as most of the trees about the house it was older than any of his children. He planted it there. In those early days of my childhood it was my confident belief that only myself, Gran'Ma and Gran'Pa and Momie and Popie knew of the infallibility of Catalpa (or as they are sometimes referred to as "Cataba") worms as fish bait. I jealously and selfishly kept the knowledge a deep dark secret, not under any circumstances to be divulged to the uninitiated, the ignorant, or even the unlucky. It was my unshakable belief that only five people in all the world knew of the virtues of those worms as fish bait! It is with some embarrassment that I here relate my surprise to find that even as far away from "More's Creek" (that ran through Gran'Pa's land in Mississippi) as Bowling Green, Kentucky, some men were frantically gathering up those worms under a 'Cataba' tree and by Goah and by Gum! They were paying for the privilege! and at so much a *worm!* I was past sixty years of age on that occasion and I felt as if a patent or a copyright belonging to Gran'Ma and myself had been violated! Oh well, I did read a lot but didn't get around much, so...maybe that lack of travel accounts...in part...for my arrested development, hein?

Now permit me to return to my attempt to describe the delight to all the senses provided by the near surroundings of that house that was our home during most of my early life. It was the habit of a songbird to perch in the early evening on moonlit, windless summer nights and sing. After its concert one evening I mistakenly referred to it as a nightingale. Gran'Pa said no, that it was a night singing wood thrush, that there were no nightingales in America, only in the old world, but that the American night singing wood thrush was a near relation. I'm quite sure Gran'Pa was correct. However, the vocal acrobatics, the trills, runs and musical virtuosity of that incredible bird is quite beyond my ability to adequately describe. Its song always charmed me, to compare a canary to that impossible bird is as to compare Gene Autry to Enrico Caruso.

In the back yard, south of the house, stood a large black walnut tree, a good sized pecan tree and a peach tree. The walnut tree was much older than either of the pecan trees. Gran'Pa

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<sup>2</sup>*Editor's Note (Irma Marie Hale):* I think this is incorrect as all the information I have found says that James Thomas Lynch was born on June 15, 1834 and they married on November 23, 1852.

planted the pecans and of course the peach tree. The walnut was there long before the house was built. When we three boys, myself, Jamie and Wade were small each of us claimed a pecan tree as our personal property, our ownership made absolute by covenant with Gran'Pa. When my sister Sally (Sarah Catherine) got to be about three years old she was somewhat put upon or felt that someone had ignored her interests as she did not own a pecan tree. So I wrote out a conveyance deed to her all my right, title and interest in my pecan tree. She was very happy in the possession of her newly acquired property, while she remember her "deed."

To the east of the house were several black walnut trees. Beyond them were Gran'Pa and Gran'Ma's apple, peach and plum trees. The only names of the apple trees I recall that grew there were a "sweet apple" and a "crabapple" tree. There were other varieties, of course. Of the peach trees that grew there I recall the name of only one. Gran'Pa and Gran'Ma called it an Indian peach tree. The fruit of that tree when ripe had narrow red stripes that ran from stem to blossom end. I remember that it contained far more juice than other kinds of peaches and its flavor was delightful. One day when Gran'Pa and I were eating some of those peaches and when I had almost finished one I discovered a worm hole and told Gran'Pa that I couldn't find the worm in what was left, that I believed I must have eaten the worm. He said with a grin, "Don't worry, if the worm could stand it, I'm sure you can." Such was my complete confidence in Gran'Pa's assurance that I finished eating that peach and several additional ones as well! I was anything but 'finicky' ...or more correctly finical.

[There was} another fruit tree which I must not fail to mention because of its extreme rarity even in those days of my life. It grew near the summit of the hill on which the house was built and southwest of the orchard above described, and it was a native and true wild plum tree. Its fruit was when ripe of a deep purple and was very sharp to the taste but of a flavor indescribably delicious and made the most wonderful jelly I ever tasted.

That tree was not a large one, but Gran'Pa told me that despite its small size as compared to other trees that he believed it to have been even at that time very old, he told me that it was growing there when he built his house and that it had grown very little large in all that time. He said that he had seen no more of its kind in his life than three. Gran'Pa had few hard and fast rules where we were concerned, but one of those was that we were never to injure that small tree. We were forbidden even to climb it to get the plums. He had a wooden hook on the end of a large cane (fishing pole cane) with which he would shake the plums down when they were ripe. None of those plums were more than three quarters of an inch in diameter or over an inch long.

Also between the orchard and the house was a large bench made of a split log, split side up. Legs of wood were its supports. They were inserted into the underside by means of auger holes bored into it and were at an angle that made it very stable, not easy to overturn. On the upper flat surface which was about two feet wide and twelve feet long were six honeybee hives. They supplied an abundance of honey, delicious and healthful. It was and always has been my favorite sweet.

Just beyond the apple and peach trees flowed a small brook. Its source the hill that stood to the north of the little valley from the base of which a small spring issued. Its flow was of sufficient volume to cause the little brook to flow the year round. A little south of the orchard very large sweetgum trees grew along both sides of the little brook providing beauty to the view as well as shade for both horses and cattle that pastured there. During midday in summer both horses and cattle would congregate there to find relief from the hot sunshine on the open grassland where they grazed during morning and afternoon hours. The little brook that is the main subject of this paragraph meandered about, took a southwesterly course along the south

base of the hill upon which Gran'Pa's house was built, and after flowing west through a grove of ash trees found its way into "bell branch" some two hundred yards to the west of the ash trees. "Bell branch" was more creek than branch, as it was knee deep at the ford or at the place where the road crossed and naturally more correctly expressed, as might be expected, the winding road crossed it where the water was less deep than usual either above or below the ford. After heavy rains it was impassable except on horseback, and then the horse had to swim. For the record and before concluding this paragraph, Gran'Pa and Gran'Ma Lynch owned the land to some distance on both back of Bell branch and same was true of More's Creek into which Bell branch flowed. I shall later write more about some of the beauty of the bottom lands and other of its attractions.

To return to the description of the land east of the house.

Beyond the walnut trees, the orchard and the brook, the land rose to the summit of a low hill on which grew numerous hardwood trees. Over the hill and in the valley below was a large spring flowing up from a white sandy bottom, its waters clear as finest crystal, pure and cold. A never ending source of uncontaminated, cold and healthful water. It was also the source of the waters that filled the fishpond that lay at some distance down hill from the spring. Above the spring to the north was a high hill and on its summit stood a very large, very tall pine. Near its top it forked, and so had actually a double top, the only large pine tree I've ever seen that had such a form. Situated as it was on the top of the high hill and being very tall itself, it could be seen from almost any place on Gran'Pa's land.

Below the fishpond and flowing parallel to the dam was another brook, its source further to the east but on Gran'Pa's land. After passing the dam and having its waters augmented by the dam's over flow, it abruptly changed its direction and flowed south and after about a quarter of a mile flowed into More's Creek. There were quite a number of brook trout, perch, bream and catfish in that little stream. Again for the record, we never fished in that brook. I believe that the main reason we never fished there was because the water was so clear that we could see nearly all the fish, which destroyed the illusion of catching a 'whopper'. We caught many that were smaller in More's Creek and ate them too. But to catch fish there that we could not see before we landed them was far more exciting. I believe that what Gran'Ma once said that I remember, "It is what you look forward to that is sometimes more enjoyable than what happens today," gives the best reason why we never fished in that sizable brook.

At this stage of my description I must refer to a black walnut tree that stood on the top of a low hill west of the brook referred to in the preceding paragraph. It was the largest of its kind that I have ever seen up to this time and I lack less than thirty days to my seventy-fourth birthday. It was more than five feet in diameter, its trunk over nine feet in length before it formed very large, very long branches, its trunk after its first large limbs continued to a height of about sixty feet. It spread its branches to shade many hundreds of square feet. It bore annually many bushels of black walnuts. I've never in my lifetime seen a more beautiful tree. I regret to relate that on my last visit to that place I saw that someone had cut that tree. Its top was still full of wilted leaves and they had also a harvest of some bushels of walnuts. I wept for that tree as I would the murder of a friend. I know the trunk of that tree brought at least three thousand dollars, but I doubt that the money it brought was important to the one that cut it. I personally would have subsisted on a diet of 'whippoorwill peas' and 'fat back' until I died before I would have destroyed that tree. When my brothers and I were boys we always picked up large quantities of walnuts under that tree. All members of our family liked to eat them as I remember. I know that I did. I will here supply a little lore concerning the nuts and hulls of black walnuts, and how they differ in one way from hickory, scaly bark and pecans. I use the latter to compare with a walnut

because I know that most of you are familiar with how those nuts when they are mature fall to the ground as their hulls open. By contrast the hull of the black walnut does *not* open. The nut when mature falls with its thick hull intact. Each hull contains one walnut. The hull that contains the nut is about of a size of a small orange. After a few weeks the hull dries out and becomes fragile, its interior resembles a form of coarse grained powder, easily removed from the walnut itself. It is not wise to attempt to gather the nuts until the hull has thoroughly dried out because until the hull is dry it contains a juice that stains the fingers a very dark brown and it takes several days of vigorous scrubbing with soap and water to remove the stain. In addition if the skin of the fingers is cut or broken the juice stings just as painfully as it does when iodine is applied to an open cut. Moreover the color is the same as that of tincture of iodine and I have always believed it to be a germicide. The stain of the juice is far harder to remove than is the stain of iodine.

Knowing full well that some readers abhor those passages in narratives that have to do with description of places, for those of you who do not dislike such efforts on the part of the narrator, I will persist in their behalf for just a bit longer. As I said I would return to the bottom lands of Bell Branch and More's Creek, I shall at this point mention some of the features that I remember best; that I recall with such delight, because some of them were my favorite retreats or perhaps more correctly expressed, sanctuaries. Sanctuaries not from unhappiness, not from mistreatment or from a lack of love or understanding by parents or grandparents. No, I sought out those places because of their particular solace, their all enveloping peace.

First I'll describe to the best of my ability a grove of beech trees that grew below and south of the ford where the road crossed the branch if the traveler was heading west. Those very old, very large beech trees dominated the area during the summer and fall. Their dense foliage which provided the comfort not rivaled by modern air conditioning also blessed the pilgrim with a midday twilight in which their light grey bark appeared almost white in the subdued light so gently created by those noble, those lovely trees. I can recall even today with what delight I ran my hands over their trunks and laid my cheek against the cool bark, feeling the hope that they might somehow understand my affinity for them. That place where they flourished was to me hallowed land. In addition to beech trees, and undercover of ironwood, blackgum and holly trees grew abundantly. A few hundred yards further south the waters of Bell Branch flowed into More's Creek and along the south bank of the latter stream a very cold spring added its flow to the water of More's Creek. At that place the creek was shallow and my brothers, Jamie and Wade and I would walk barefoot in the hottest summer enjoying the almost icy shock of the very cold water. We, as did everyone else, called it "Gandy's Spring."

Further down stream was a deep hole where a large willow tree leaned across from the south to the north bank of the stream. As Gran'Pa and Gran'Ma's house was north of the stream, Gran'Ma and I always fished from the north side and the "Bent Willow Hole" was a favorite spot and nearly always rewarded our efforts with a satisfactory string of fish. Momie would go fishing with us, but not often, perhaps because she was too busy or maybe because she didn't enjoy fishing as much as Gran'Ma and I did.

A short distance down stream and on the south bank was a large cane break, an inexhaustible source of fishing poles (or so we termed them) of almost any reasonable size or length. The cane grew so thickly it was almost impossible to walk through the growth. Further down stream was another deep place both wide and long and that was where Jamie and I learned to swim, first using 'water wings' which Gran'Pa fashioned using two large gourds and a piece of strong string to form each pair. Gran'Pa went into the water with us showing by

demonstration the proper stroking. We learned very quickly but not as well as Gran'Pa. He swam the breast stroke which to me was the most exhausting of all forms of swimming. Gran'Pa said it was because I didn't use my legs and feet properly, i.e., alternately, while using my arms in unison. I settles for less than perfection and never achieved either style or proper use of the feet in that or any other method of swimming, though I developed into a strong and tireless swimmer despite my lack of style. The water in that creek was cold enough to drink even in hottest summer. Swimming there was a chilly sport but lots of fun. Gran'Pa would not permit us to stay in the water too long. His order to come out was made welcome because of the chill. We obeyed him in all things. Gran'Pa's orders were never harsh or strident, but to disobey them was so unthinkable I honored his instructions completely. However I was sometimes domineering and childishly unaware of my offence, in my relations with my brother Jamie. I received a short lecture from Gran'Pa, short, sharp but to the point for that offence. Any idea of disobedience to Gran'Pa's code never entered my thoughts. Had the breaking of any of the ten commandments been of any interest to me and I had known how I might have violated the 4th, about keeping the Sabbath holy or maybe the 10th, thou shalt not covet, but I never would have disobeyed Gran'Pa. I number the commandments according to the book of common prayer in use by the episcopal church. Further along you will be informed of my early regard for the third commandment.

To the west some fifty yards from the house were six horse apple trees. Why the name 'horse apple' was applied I've no idea unless horses are better judges than humans. If that is true I must qualify as a horse for I liked the wonderful flavor, juiciness and tartness of those large green apples more than any of the other varieties (a golden yellow when *fully* ripe) and they would keep all winter if individually wrapped in paper and carefully stored in a dark cool place. Such a place was Gran'Pa's closet and in which he stored several barrels in the late fall. It was in that closet that he also kept his winter supply of whiskey, 'under lock and key', the sole reason for the security measures was because Gran'Pa had three grown grandsons each of whom had a fondness for the 'creature.' That did not measure up to Gran'Pa's standard of moderation. I've written into a following chapter an incident germane to Gran'Pa's precaution safeguarding his whiskey.

North of the house and across the road was a small field or "patch" where Gran'Pa raised or cultivated pop corn and around its border he planted a field of speckled peas. The pop corn for us and the peas for the quail that ranged in large numbers there about. Gran'Pa fulfilled all his responsibilities to persons, domestic animals and wildlife. He was, I do believe one of the original conservationists.

On the slope downhill from the little field just described two large very tall pine trees grew, surrounded by an undercover of various hardwood trees. Through the valley below ran yet another small but ever flowing little brook that ran along the lowland until it joined the flow of Bell Branch above the ford herein before described. Up the road and parallel to the little field and growing near the top of the hill was an American chestnut tree, one of the very last of its kind in North America. I have no hope of ever seeing its like again, although it once flourished in great forests from Maine to Mississippi. The beauty of its white blossoms in spring enhancing that season and its straw colored burrs in form similar to a sea urchin each of which opened in the fall to allow four large nuts encased in a dark brown shell easily removed with the blade of a pocket knife, or the teeth. The meat of the chestnut was all of a piece roughly egg shaped, somewhat flat, broader than its length. The chestnuts were sweet and tasty, raw, boiled or roasted. Chestnuts were one of the necessary components of stuffing for the Thanksgiving,

Christmas and New Year's turkeys. All those wonderful forests died in a matter of a few years because some damn fool imported a Chinese chestnut sprout infested with a fungus to which it is immune, but that fungus of which it was a carrier destroyed every American chestnut because it had no immunity. The destruction of those beautiful, fruitful trees was one of the very real American tragedies. A Chinese chestnut adds nothing to any dish. It is white and completely devoid of any taste whatsoever. I'd by far prefer a slice of raw turnip. I admit that a raw turnip is not an item on the bill of fare of an epicure, but it *can* be tasted if not particularly enjoyed, which is more than I can say for a Chinese chestnut. Oh well...we grieve only for things and persons we love. Things, places and times when they pass away carry with them our regrets for our pleasure in them and is accepted by us as a justification for our grief. We can not so philosophically accept the grief we suffer at the loss of someone we love. The grief abides with us until we perform our last act of morality.

There are many, many more memories of features, places, of flora and fauna, of places fondly cherished that I remember which are so numerous that many additional pages would be required to recount and to describe, that I will omit because of a sense of urgency to return to the main purpose of the people concerned that prompted this account as they are of greater interest to both you and myself. For that reason I conclude this chapter. I hope you may have enjoyed the foregoing. It was written for you, and it was a pleasure to me to relate and to remember.



## A Short History of My Life and Times

### Chapter Two

When I first thought about the title I would give this account and finally called it “A Short History of My Life and Times,” I very soon realized that I might have displayed better judgment by calling it by another name. People that know me best (and it is for them I wrote it) might on reading the title it bears, conclude that I had chosen a dull subject. That was why I wrote the preface. I felt that it might serve as an inducement, a device by which I could capture their interest in the subject matter of what might appear because of the title, of little interest and a waste of time to read.

I here wish to insist, that to me, my life has been richly rewarding. I have had joy and happiness in great measure. I look forward with hope that my life is not to near its end. I’ve had sorrows, of course, I’ve had disappointments, to be sure, but I’ve never been disappointed by those dearest to me, in the past or in the present. They have all rewarded me, and have loved me, far beyond my desserts, and I do believe that I’ve loved them, if not as much as they deserved to be loved, I’ve sincerely done my best and I know that I have always had a great capacity for loving. My greatest regret is that I could not make that love manifest with worldly goods; material blessings. Such blessings would have made redundant, verbal declarations, all the long way from “Dan to Bersheba.”

The most important, the most necessary, the most indispensable factors of a happy, interesting and joyful life are the wonderful people that share and live it with you. Such people will supply the chief interest in the narrative from its beginning to its end. Life itself is bestowed upon every person by that person’s parents. To a son which God in His Grace and favor saw fit to endow with parents such as those He bestowed upon me; love and honor were natural acts, performed in joy and pride. The Fifth Commandment, “Honor thy Father and thy Mother” was a pleasure to obey, without effort, without limit or reservation. All the days of their lives which I shared, in my childhood, adolescence and manhood, in all the days that have passed since they died, I have honored and loved them. I always shall.

First I will write about my mother. I hope to be able to convey to you something of her character and her personality. Although I have heard her say upon occasion “Self praise is half scandal,” she was nevertheless a proud woman of great dignity and commanding presence. She was intensely loyal to those she loved, ever faithful, ever tender and true. With her, right *was* right and wrong *was* wrong; and no compromise was possible between the two.

When I was small she spanked me or used a small switch on me when I was naughty. As I grew too old for such forms of punishment she resorted to a lecture, or as she termed it, a ‘tongue-lashing.’ Here for the record permit me to say that I would have submitted gladly to the first two methods of punishment, if by doing so I might have escaped the latter. To quote a distant cousin, old when I was young, who said, “*The Truth hurts.*” An aphorism almost impossible to dispute if one is guilty of a wrongful act, and a plea, “*mea culpa*” is necessary for absolution. Believe me when I say Momie was not quick to hold blameless one who was in error. However, for her own she was ever completely, staunchly, their advocate; and right or wrong their courageous defender, their unassailable citadel and sanctuary. In some way I sincerely believe that I am more like my mother than any one of her children. I know that she found it almost impossible to forgive an enemy. She denied that once to me when she was old. On that

occasion when I said to her that I was very like her in that respect, she said that when I was as old as she was then that would change. I'm older now than she was then, and I have not changed in that respect, for I cannot forgive my enemies, nay, not one, nor can I love them, or forget.

I can boast of my mother's appearance. She was tall, taller than most women of her day. She stood five feet, ten inches, slender and straight as a lance, proud as a queen, a statuesque brunette and endowed with an almost impossible beauty of features. I've a photograph of her in her early maturity that will substantiate my statement, my boast of her beauty. She was not merely pretty, she was beautiful. Another thing I must tell you about Momie. She could play the guitar and very well too. She had a sweet contralto voice. I loved to hear her sing and play her own accompaniment. But the instrument that she played best of all was the banjo. It was seldom that any of us could persuade her to demonstrate her virtuosity on that boisterous, saucy instrument. A banjo I think is the merriest of all musical instruments. My mother could make a banjo give of its best. I often wondered how and where Momie and Popie learned music and how they learned to play the violin, guitar and Mama the banjo. There were very few things I wanted to learn to do as a boy and young man, as much as to play the Spanish guitar. I never learned.

I believe Momie's reluctance to play the banjo for us was because she didn't consider the banjo a proper instrument for a lady. Well, maybe she was right about that, for a banjo is a boisterous, saucy, immodest, irreverent, but delightful thing.

I, being the first born of all my parents' children, can remember them when they were young and in their prime. When I was born my mother was in the twentieth year and my father was only twenty-seven. So I remember my mother when she was in her middle twenties and my father in his very early thirties. Thank God I do remember them and how they loved each other when they were young. Do not believe that they loved each other less as time passed. Their love remained as constant as the fixed stars. Time did not dim or age diminish their love, but young love has a quality all its own and I can distinctly remember how they kissed each other each time Popie left the house and however often he returned. Each kiss was a double one short but ardent. Even a child cannot but see and understand when his parents love each other very dearly.

My father, or Popie as all his children addressed him, was of very large frame, weighed two hundred and twenty pounds and measured five feet eleven and three-quarter inches, without shoes. He was of fine appearance whose presence commanded attention in any company. His physical strength was phenomenal, quite extraordinary.

I remember in those early days of my life the dances which I was privileged to attend, how they waltzed. My father, with his love in his arms despite his great strength, seemed together with my mother, almost to levitate so lightly did they dance. They also would dance the Schottische, a more restrained and refined version of the polka. Only occasionally could Popie persuade my mother to dance the polka with him. My mother seemed to regard that dance as she did the banjo, not quite suitable to a lady, but my father danced it with an *elan*, and exuberance and jollity that communicated joy and merriment to all present. He was a very merry gentleman in those days, so long ago.

I have told you that we all at the time, my brothers and my sister lived together with our mother and father in the house of my mother's parents. Here I wish to make the record very clear that our living with them in their house and on Gran'Pa's and Gran'Ma's land was not caused by any financial necessity on the part of my parents or my grandparents. No, oh no! Mutual love and congeniality created that arrangement and how happy we all were to live together. Today, I, being a grandfather, hear with amazement and some disgust, other grandparents say, "I love my grandchildren, but I'm glad when they've gone home and left *me* in peace." How far they fall

short of the grace, the excellence of my maternal grandparents. When I remember how they took into their home and reared the little orphans of the second son Jefferson Lynch were all grown men and women when I was born. Effie Lynch, Jefferson's oldest child, was older than my own mother, who was her aunt. I loved all those first cousins, especially Clyde, the oldest of the three brothers, and I was very fond of Elbert, the youngest, whom I called, as did every one else, "Ebbie." He was a charming young rascal and loved by all who knew him. If Popie had a near rival when it came to dancing the polka, Ebbie was the man. He, Ebbie, was a cross and trial to cousin Clyde, who was forever getting him out of one difficulty or another, financial or otherwise. Ebbie finally left and went to Texas whether from choice or necessity, I never knew being but a child at the time. I was very sad to see him go. I remember that a few days later when sitting on Gran'Pa's front porch with him, Popie and Clyde, I asked Clyde if he hoped that Ebbie would soon come home from Texas. He answered, "No."

When I asked him why he was grinning and he laughed aloud, hugged me, and replied: "Richard, I've been to the Texas panhandle where Ebbie is now and I'm happy just thinking about how far it is from way out there back to Gran'Pa's."

Poor cousin Clyde. He scrupulously paid his own debts and when the time finally came when he couldn't, he blew his life out to pay them and to take care of his wife and his children. Carlton Lynch, a cousin of Clyde and Clyde's son, Conrad Lynch, took the letter from his pocket where he lay dead after his suicide, addressed to his wife cousin Annie who never saw it. The letter said: "Sweetheart, this is the only way I could take care of you and our children. Forgive me, pay my little debts and love me." He had a fair amount of insurance in force that took care of everything quite adequately. Carlton burned the letter for fear of complications in cousin Annie collecting Clyde's insurance and to save her the heartbreak of knowing that he had literally died for her convenience, and for his children.

Clyde, dear old cousin; I cried all day when I heard he was dead. I know, of course, all the rumors that Clyde was involved in boot legging, feared an indictment, etc., but I *know* because I made it my business to find out that my dear old cousin never made a penny on "White Lightning". *No*, cousin Clyde was one of the noble Lynch's.

I, being an old fangled man, and even before I was twenty-one years of age, could buy the best corn whisky made in north Mississippi, and from a man to whom I sold a new Ford automobile, who wouldn't have sold Clyde a pint for a thousand dollars, nor to Popie either, even if he had wanted it, which he did not. Why? Well, you may draw your own conclusion, but I'll give you a clue. If called up before a grand jury, I'd have had a lapse of memory. For the record I never resold any whisky. I drank it with friends. Anyway, I never bought one pint; he, the excellent distiller, gave me all I wanted. Yes, he was a friend of mine. And yes, I had all sorts of friends. And all of them, both good and by some standards bad, were all true to me. My God forgive me, and all of them. I certainly was no better than the best of them and I like to believe that I was not quite as bad as the worst of them. But I was bad enough. I almost said, "I'm sorry to say," but am I really sorry? Marcia, my darling, you said, "Daddy, I want it all," when we were discussing "My Life and Times"; well, there it is...part of it. Some of one's sins he can tell only to God, and ask his forgiveness as I told you in a recent letter I've never entered into any covenant with the devil, verbal, written, or otherwise. I've trafficked with him at times, but on a temporary basis, with no strings attached or any fine print in an amendment. And so far he has made no claim upon me, so I give the devil his dues. So, if he should ever call me to account, I'll deny any obligation and demand evidence and a written contract. He might present some evidence but no contract in writing and I hope no witnesses. There were none present that I can

recall. My advice to all of you who read this is that you eschew the fallen archangel, son of the morning. Have nothing at all to do with him. If you believe in God, you have to believe in the devil, because, we know, without God, there could be no devil. We know from Holy Writ that he, the devil, tried to persuade Jesus Christ, the son of God, to bow down and worship him. Therefore, never underestimate the wiles of the attractiveness of the devil for he is very old and very wise and of great powers of persuasion. He also has a case full of most attractive samples. "Streakers," are *not* among his samples. If an archangel can blush, then Lucifer must be blushing. The demoniac possession of the "Streakers" is but an immoral absurdity, in no way equal to the wiles, the refined temptations or in the good taste displayed by Lucifer. I'll be his advocate in that instance, for although he is fallen, he is after all, still an archangel. At this point I'll for the nonce write no more of the devil or of his disciples, or of myself. I will now return to the original purpose of this chapter which was, and is, to acquaint all of you with my parents, your grand and great grandparents.

My father had a much better income than any of his contemporaries in our community. He also spent more on all of us than anyone else spent on their wives and children in our community. My father would also lend money to any friend in need. It wasn't even necessary for a man to be his friend if he was in trouble and lacked the means to support his family. Of course, he would always, for the sake of good order, take a mortgage on the man's horses, his wagon, his farm implements, his crops or other assets but he never foreclosed a mortgage in his entire life. He would instead just let the debtor sign a new note or just tell him to pay him when he could. Some would pay him, but many never did. I once asked him why he did not foreclose a mortgage on the property of a man who owed him a considerable sum of money. I was only about eleven years old at the time, but I remember his answer as well as if it had been yesterday. He said, "Son, if I did, the poor devil couldn't feed or shelter his wife and his children. He is having a hard time doing it now." To Popie, it was truly 'more blessed to give than to receive.' I know that God will bless him eternally for he was truly a saint even without portfolio. He was the most civilized of men. A perfect specimen of homo sapiens, thinking man. I fear that his kind may be doomed as an endangered species. I once asked him if he didn't hate a cousin who did not vote for him after Popie's victorious race for senator of Lafayette County, whereafter he served for four years as Chairman of the Finance Committee and with distinction. Popie smiled and said, "No."

I said, "Why not? He is our cousin."

Popie laughed and replied, "He is your and your Momie's cousin, not mine."

Then he told me that the hardest thing he had ever attempted to do was to stay angry with anyone for more than thirty minutes. He also told me on that occasion, "Richard, whenever something bad happens, most everyone will say that it was God's will. But when something wonderful occurs, there are always many men and politicians who are ready to claim the credit for it." How very true his words were, then and now. I cannot but ponder on my own shortcomings in the matter of forgiveness. When compared to my father's almost effortless ease of forgiveness. He could even forget as well. I seem unable to do either. I suppose because of my inability to forgive or forget, that it is a very great sin. Well, if it is, and Jesus Christ did truly command us to love our enemies which I sometimes doubt that he did, then he certainly gave the devil's disciples a fearful advantage over those who love God. I recommend that we hang them by their collective necks until they're dead and leave their forgiveness to God; that is his business. If therein we sin we will take comfort in what St. Paul said, "It is a true saying and worthy of all men to be received, that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners, "and

equally comforting is what St. John said, “If any man sin we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the Righteous, who is the propitiation for our sins.” Last and most important of all, Jesus Christ said, “Come unto me all ye who are weary and heavy laden and *I* will give you rest.”

I know, of course, that some, or maybe all of you will derive considerable amusement in my sanctimonious presumption in quoting the scriptures; believing some and doubting others; however, since I do believe that Jesus of Nazareth was the Son of God, some of the things which he is reported to have said, to me seem to make more sense than others. Since I also believe that almost anything is possible it may well be that some of the things they (his apostles) said Jesus said, might have been the result of an error in translation. I’ve been unable to find any evidence that would lead me to believe that he loved the pharisees. He did love sinners and never failed to heal and bless them.

I devoutly pray that I will be forgiven my sins, both of omission and commission. I also pray as King David did that I will be forgiven for my presumptuous sins. I also pray that I’ll be forgiven for any other kind of variety of sin. Believe me that I also pray that all of you, if you sin, have sinned, or ever should sin, in any of the above listed categories, your sins may be forgiven you.

Now for a little heresy, a lot of love and a little humor, if all of you can’t go to heaven I’m not keen on going myself, and that’s the truth, as I still live and breathe. Without all of you there, it would be a dull place entirely, and I don’t think I’d enjoy it, at all, at all! So be good, the Lot of Yez, so ye may come along with me...To heaven, to be sure, later, of course, when you are ready, and willing. I’m not ready yet myself, or “willin” either.

I sincerely assure all of you that my remarks pertaining to the Holy Scriptures and my beliefs are not for the purpose of influencing your thinking or your beliefs; and God forbid! I state them only for the purpose that all of you may know *me* more completely, and if you think you should, pray for me. I’d appreciate your prayers for my salutation. Sure and I’d regret very much to go to hell because of an error in judgment, or a technicality.

When I began this chapter it was not my intent to speak of myself or the devil. My intent was to acquaint all of you with the excellence, the personality and the grace of each of my parents. I hope that I’ve succeeded to some extent. If I have, I rejoice. I feel that what I’ve written will cause all of you to appreciate them. I sincerely hope you will.

In concluding this chapter I’ll tell you a little story that my father once told me. He said two boys were fighting. When a man pulled them apart, he asked the most furious one what the fight was about.

He answered, pointing to his adversary, “He called my sister Redheaded.”

“So what’s wrong with that? Suppose she *is* Redheaded?”

“Aw, mister, I don’t *have* a sister. It’s just the principle of it.”

So speaking of enemies, I have no personal ones that I know about. “It’s just the principle of the thing.”

## Chapter Three

The most vivid of my early memories was and is the birth of my brother James Laurel Eskridge. When Momie agreed or rather selected his first and second names, she did it with the strict stipulation, proviso and edict that he should be called by all and sundry, "Jamie." Momie went even further and issued an injunction that no one or several would call him Jim, Jimmie, or Laurel, or Lar'l. Momie did not like her own 'callin' name Jimmie, nor did she quite approve Gran'ma or anyone else calling Gran'pa 'Jim.' She believed he should have been called by everyone "James." She loved his having been named "James" after Gran'pa, but she resented his being called 'Jimmie' - as he was called by every one, even by Gran'pa, Gran'ma, and Popie. I do believe her aversion to his being called Laurel or Lar'l was because she never loved Gran'daddy Eskridge, nor like him either. She did however feel that it was proper that he, Jamie, be named for his two grandfathers. All of you will note that all her other children were called by their second names. Jamie alone was so called by that beautiful version of his first name, Jamie.

I would have preferred that my little sister, my only sister, to have been called by her first two names, Sarah Catherine. I suggested that double name to Momie when my only sister was a little baby, but Momie vetoed my suggestion because she said she didn't want her only daughter to be called 'Sally.' I thought at the time, with horror, "what if she should be called 'Kate,' or more awfully, 'Katie,'" but I did not put my thought in words to Momie. So we call called her Catherine, at least in Momie's presence, though I've always thought of her as Sarah Catherine or 'Sally,' the more intimate and delightful variation of Sarah. I was, of course, a minority of one, and I still am as every one also called and still calls her Catherine. Jamie always called her 'Sister' as long as he lived.

I will at this time return to my memories of the day when my brother Jamie was born. It occurred in the house of Gran'pa and Gran'ma Lynch. Momie bore all her children at home as did most women in those days, which to my way of thinking was a most admirable, courageous, and also a barbarous custom.

On that day Gran'pa and I went for a long walk up the road leading to DeLay, the little village referred to in the first paragraph of this narrative. The walk was leisurely and as was all walks I ever accompanied him on, interesting and pleasant. I know that when we were near the foot of the hill we met Dr. Elzey, a man well past middle age, and he was riding a horse, that we called then a dark chestnut in color. He wore the most unusual straw hat that I had ever seen and I've never seen its like again in all the seventy-one and a half year that have passed since that day. As I wrote above it was of straw. Its brim was not overly broad. Above the brim some inches above the band it was cut off and thin narrow strips of either metal or whalebone held the crown some six inches above the rest of the hat as a sort of fly roof and the air could circulate freely about the good man's head while the crown kept the summer sun from shining directly down on his skull. The hat was of a dark tan. Its strange and unusual appearance made an indelible imprint on my memory. I am unable to remember anything whatever of his features or his apparel. I do however remember that he told Gran'pa and me that he heard that my Momie was not feeling well, that he was on his way to see her, and that he had a new baby in his medicine bag that he was going to give her if she wanted it, that a new baby in the house might make her feel better.

Although our walk did not cover much territory it was managed by Gran'pa so that it was of long duration while he pointed out many things along the way to interest and amuse me. One

object that I remember with great clarity and detail was a larger than ordinary hornets nest. It was larger than a basketball but in shape similar to a football. It was also populated by a colony of hornets entirely proportionate to its outsize, or a larger than usual hornets nest.

I can recall no further detail of our walk save one, the doctor overtaking us on his way back and telling me that my Momie had indeed kept the baby and that I had a baby brother. I know that Gran'pa and I walked home in a big hurry. I also remember that I was very proud of my little brother. I continued to be proud of him as long as he lived. Of his appearance; of which room in the house he and my mother were at the time, I have not the faintest memory.

My childhood was a happy one. Of course, I remember having whooping cough. My brother Jamie and I had that malady at the same time and it was a most annoying one, but as we both were robust children, it did not confine either of us to the bed or to the house. The way we contracted that disease is amusing to remember. My great aunt Hannah Lancaster had two sons with whom we played almost daily. They contracted the disorder before Jamie and I did. Aunt Hannah told my mother about it, and we were told that we were not to cross the fence that ran along the property line. Aunt Hannah's boys were given the same orders. Otis and Johnson Lancaster, and Jamie and I scrupulously obeyed our orders; however, we met several times every day at the big wooden gate and stood talking to each other, often climbing on the gate facing each other, and they would, of course, cough in our faces. As a consequence, we caught whooping cough from them, although we obeyed the letter if not the spirit of our instructions. Because of our thorough exposure we were soon coughing and whooping, gagging and vomiting in unison with them. Since there was no longer any reason to avoid their company, we resumed our close association, sharing our common affliction.

At that time we were living in the house and on the land that had been owned by our great grandparents, James Ira Eskridge and Nancy Potts Goforth Eskridge. At that time the house and the land on which it was located was owned by my father and mother who had acquired title to it by purchase from the other heirs of our great grandparents above-named. It was in that place that our brother Clarence Wade Hobson Eskridge was born. I remember little of that event. I do remember, however, that his birth came as a complete surprise to me, and as I recall, he was not regarded by me with much enthusiasm. While looking upon him in the bed with my mother, I remarked to Momie and Popie that his head was not much bigger than a walnut. That observation evoked no favorable comment from either my mother or my father, and I was promptly made aware of their disapproval of my reaction to his appearance. He was a completely normal new baby, and in self-justification I'll relate here that I very soon grew to love him and continued so to do as long as he lived.

It was in that house that I became ill with malaria. I, of course, don't know if the mosquito or mosquitoes that infected me bit me in that house or not, but as I understand it, the female anopheles mosquito flies and bites only at night and that house was certainly suspect to say the least. It did not have screen doors or windows, nor for that matter, did any other house in Lafayette County at that time that I had any knowledge of concerning such equipment. Everyone used a sort of cloth that resembled screen wire or wire screens, called "Mosquito Bars." They were hung over the beds at night. At night and before bedtime it was everyone's look-out to fight off his or her own mosquitoes. I evidently did not win every battle with those pestiferous insects for I had a severe bout with malaria. Chills followed by high fevers. A most unpleasant and dangerous disease. In those days the only specific cure was massive doses of quinine taken at regular intervals preceding 'chill time.' That medicine, bitter as gall, had to be forced on a child, and I was no exception. Had I not been blessed with exceptionally dedicated parents, I would

have never survived. As it was, to put it profanely, I did damn near die. One of the annoying side effects of quinine is a buzzing in the ears. I described the effect by saying that it made my 'head roar.' A far more unpleasant side effect however is, that one has a bitter taste in the mouth and nearly every food or liquid, even water, tastes as bitter as gall. I believe that even after being cured of malaria I would have starved to death if my father hadn't almost forced me to take one experimental bite of turnip greens. The natural bitter taste of that vegetable disguised the bitter taste in my mouth. It was delicious. After that first bite, I demanded and got that vegetable three times a day for quite some time with, of course, other food eaten with turnip greens. Before beginning to eat again, it seemed to me that everything even smelled bitter. But enough and more than enough of such dreary and boring details. I relate them only because they were part of my life and I hope that you, Marcia, your husband, Carl, and your children, my grandchildren, and our descendants will upon reading the above description of malaria avoid exposure to that disease as you would avoid the plague. It is a most unpleasant and without care, and proper medication, a fatal disease.

I was most fortunate as a child and during my growing-up, because my four grandparents were still alive during my youth and no more than a few miles ever separated us for more than a few weeks. Gran'pa and Gran'ma Lynch did go on a visit to their oldest daughter and her family who lived in Dallas, Texas. They did not stay very long and were soon home again.

I asked my grandparents innumerable questions concerning events that happened when they were young. Such questions as how old were they when they got married, and how they lived and what they did in the years before, during, and after the Civil War. I asked many questions about my great-grandparents and my great-great grandparents. I asked them how many brothers and sisters they had in addition to the great aunts and uncles that I knew personally. I never tired of my grandfather Lynch, relating the details of his adventures while he served as a cavalryman under Nathaniel Bedford Forrest, a general of the Confederacy. I, of course, asked him how many Yankees he killed personally, and I remember being somewhat disappointed when he said he didn't know. I would have been better pleased if he had told me he had accounted for at least a regiment. Gran'pa, however, being a truthful man in all things, gave me a truthful answer, explaining that even when a soldier fired at an individual enemy soldier and he fell, one had to remember that several of his comrades might have fired at the same time, **at** the same man. I privately held the very (to me) pleasant conclusion that he must have at least killed several hundred. Permit me, dear reader, an aside to the effect that in the light of recent political events, edicts and errors on the part of the higher echelons of the judiciary, I fear that Gran'pa didn't kill enough, or that he didn't kill the ones who needed it the most. Permit me also the observation that it is rare indeed when the right persons are killed in any war because the ones who need killing most never go to war.

At this time I will first set down in this narrative an incident related to me by Gran'pa, an amusing incident to him, but to me who loved him it had its elements of sadness and tragedy. Here, I quote Gran'pa's words as accurately as possible from memory of his words uttered at least sixty years ago.

"One day just at dusk (Gran'pa's word for twilight), our cavalry brigade charged a Yankee army camp. We took them by surprise. As they badly outnumbered us our purpose was to cut them up and disorganize them, divert them from their planned march the next day because we would be behind them after charging through their camp which we did with some considerable success. It was one of the few engagements Forrest's Cavalry fought completely on horseback. During the charge no man in my company was killed, but one was wounded. A flesh



wound of his thigh. None of us had time for more than one shot, no chance to reload as we were at full gallop, and a saber slash or two at anyone foolish or foolhardy enough to get in the way. Seeing a haversack hanging from a tent pole and hoping it had something good to eat in it I hooked it off with my saber and galloped on without a pause followed by my Negro mounted on my spare horse who followed close behind me. After full dark as we galloped on he said, 'Marse Jim, is de anything to eat in dat haversack you got.' I said, 'I don't know, but I hope so.' I put my hand in it and found that it had a piece of dry salt pork and I told him we would cook it when we stopped next morning, and he said, 'Marse Jim I so hongry please gimme one bit e of it raw.' I was vexed with him for wanting to eat it raw, but I did cut off a piece and give it to him and by 'Dorge' (Gran'pa's pronunciations of 'By George') being very hungry myself, I sliced off another piece with my pocket knife for myself and found it good. As we rode along in the dark I'd cut off a bite for him and one for me until there was none left. At day-break he asked if there was no more of the pork left, and I felt again and got a handful of something which upon my examining by daylight found to be a handful of skippers (a sort of worm or maggot that infests salt pork in summer). I told him nothing but a handful of skippers and in disgust threw them away and the haversack with them. The Negro said, 'I so hongry I coulda might nigh et dem skippers too.'"

Gran'pa would laugh as he related the incident for my entertainment. I would laugh also, but at the same time regret that there had been a time when hunger and hardship had forced him to eat such fare. He also told me that while he served as a soldier in that terrible war that he and his comrades (his term for his fellow soldiers) subsisted for days at a time on parched corn without any other food. I never sampled any raw dry salt fat back even sans skippers. However, I did try parched hard corn, and although I had perfect teeth at the time, found it hard going and I certainly would not recommend it as a steady diet.

Gran'pa's most trying experience was the wound that terminated his career as a soldier. What he called a mini-ball hit him in the shin and broke both bones below the knee. The adjective 'mini' was not used to denote or describe its small size, for it was not small. The ball was much larger than a .45 cal., a heavy lead bullet somewhat larger even than a .50 cal. It made a terrible wound as well as splintering the bones. The prefix 'mini' was used because in flight when spent it made the sound, 'mini-mini-mini,' and was therefore called by southern soldiers a 'mini-ball.'

Gran'pa told how he crawled into a thicket of underbrush, hoping to hide himself until after the Union soldiers had gone and then to try somehow to get back to his horse which he knew would be hitched in the vicinity where his company had dismounted before joining battle with the Union troops. He was unable to carry out his plan, however, because of what Gran'pa said was an act of cowardice by one of his fellow soldiers who was also wounded. He said the man started shouting for the Yankees to come and get him that he was wounded and that he had never fired a shot at them in his life. Gran'pa told him to shut his lying mouth, be quiet, and they could get away back to their horses or that some of their comrades would return for them. Gran'pa said that the man kept calling so he decided to kill him but when he reloaded his rifle, he discovered that they cap box on his (Gran'pa's belt) had come open and all his percussion caps were lost while he crawled into the thicket to hide himself. He said that the other man's wound amounted to almost nothing, a mere flesh wound in his flank. The Yankee soldiers, hearing the man's shouts, came and found them both. They improvised a litter in which to carry Gran'pa who couldn't walk to their field surgeon, but made the other fellow walk, laughing at him and telling him that his wound was a mere scratch. The Sergeant-in-Charge sent a soldier to

find Gran'pa's horse that he described to him, and he did find it and brought it into the Yankee camp shortly after the party arrived carrying Gran'pa.

Gran'pa told me that he wanted me know that his capture by some Northern soldiers, fighting me, was probably the best thing that could have happened to him, being wounded as he was, because both surgeons, a Colonel and a Captain realizing that he was gravely wounded, went to work on his leg almost immediately. He said they told him they were sorry that they had no chloroform (the only anesthetic in those days), but that they did have whiskey if he wanted it before they began doing the necessary to try to save his leg. He said he took a big drink of their whiskey and told them to go ahead. They were forced to make four incisions in order to see the bones, remove the splinters, place the bones and then wrap them in position using cat-gut strings, as I recall was his explanation of that step of the process, then they cleansed the wound, dressed, sutured it, put on bandages, and last of all, splints. Of course he had terrible scars, but no impairment of the leg's length or function. I asked Gran'pa if he cried when they were operating. He said, "No Richard, I didn't cry, though it hurt like fury. I grunted some," then he added with a wry smile, "Crying wouldn't have done any good; grunting didn't do much good either."

As I loved Gran'pa Lynch, as well, I believe, as any grandson ever loved a grandfather, and looking at those scars, I almost cried myself. I couldn't understand then, nor do I understand now, how a man could endure that sort of punishment. I knew, of course, that he had stood up under the pain. I knew Gran'pa always told the truth, I know it now and he had the scars to prove it. No one who knew that find old gentleman could ever have doubted his word, his bravery, or his honor.

At the time when Gran'pa was wounded and captured, he was in his late twenties and was a most unusually handsome man. He was exactly six feet tall and of medium build, as his picture (daguerreotype) taken at the time shows him. After the operation, the Colonel (Surgeon) gave him another drink of whiskey and took one himself. Gran'pa asked the sergeant to get the sack of tobacco out of his saddle bags, the sergeant did, and Gran'pa filled and lit his pipe and invited the Colonel, the Captain and the Sergeant to help themselves to a smoke. He said the Colonel told him, "Tobacco is something else we don't have and can't get. This is the first smoke I've enjoyed in a month. I'll give you a twenty dollar bill for that sack of tobacco." It contained about two pounds, Gran'pa said. He said he laughed and told the Colonel that Union money wouldn't be worth anything after the war was over, and he wouldn't accept his offer, but to take the tobacco, divide it into four equal parts, keep one part for himself, give one part each to the Captain and the Sergeant and return the remainder to him. He said they accepted his gift with many thanks. He said they took good care of his leg thereafter, changing the dressing as often as necessary and adjusting the splints after each dressing. The sergeant made him a pair of crutches and when he was able to mount and dismount, the general gave him his parole and the daguerreotype as his identification, then they gave him back his horse, bridle and saddle. His parole stated in part, "This private soldier, James Thomas Lynch, is riding a horse and saddle, his personal property and is not to be detained by Union forces as long as he observes the terms of his parole." We still have the parole and daguerreotype.

I asked Gran'pa what the terms of his parole were, and he smiled and said, "I promised I'd go home and that I wouldn't shoot any more Yankee soldiers."

After he was paroled, he did ride back to his home, to Gran'ma and their children. They had the time three children. Two sons, Samuel Henry and Jefferson Lynch, and a daughter, Drusilla Blanche. Maybe I'm wrong about their oldest daughter. She might have been born later, as was her sister, Aunt Ada Taliaferro Lynch. They both lived to be very old ladies in the

nineties. They were both living when Amanda and I were married, and Amanda met both of them. My own mother, their youngest child, was born in eighteen and eighty, fifteen years after the end of the Civil War. All the elder children and other old friends said that Gran'ma and Gran'pa accepted her slightest whim as something to be granted. I would not be at all surprised to know that they did spoil her; they both thought that she was just about perfect. I hope they did as she was in every way deserving of very special treatment. She grew up to be a very beautiful woman, my mother.

Gran'ma and Gran'pa were both prone to allow me to do just about anything I wanted to do short of burning down the house. Gran'ma Lynch, however, did upon occasion give me a very severe whipping - with a broom straw! I was so filled with surprise, consternation, and dismay, that my Gran'ma would do such an improbably, imponderable, unthinkable, and outrageous thing, that I howled like a beaten Houn' Dog! And wept floods of tears. Gran'ma was far more emotionally upset by the incident than I was, but she was one of those unfortunate individuals to whom the healing balm of tears was denied. She was and always had been completely unable to shed tears. My offence for which I deserved a far more severe whipping was burning tapers by putting one end in the fire in the fireplace and holding on to the other end until they were almost burned up. Gran'ma's concern was not for the beautifully twisted tapers she had so patiently and skillfully made of discarded newspaper, but because she feared that I would burn myself. For the edification of the uninformed, a taper, as is used here, is a very slender twist of paper that was, in those long gone days, used to ignite in the fireplace and light a candles or kerosene lamp, Gran'pa's pipe, or carried, one end blazing, into the kitchen to ignite the carefully laid kindling in the cooking stove. Twisting tapers is an art which I never mastered, but a sort of vase on the mantelpiece over the fireplace in Gran'ma's and Gran'pa's combination living and bed room always held a supply of such tapers. Permit me to relate here that I never loved Gran'ma any less for the whipping she gave me, but I also wish to state that I cannot remember any occasion thereafter when I was, openly at least, disobedient to her or her orders, or wishes. She was a wonderful, gentle, but positive and strong-minded woman. As proof of the strength of her character, consider that she very thoroughly instilled obedience in a naughty boy with a broom straw so weak and fragile one could not have dislodged an anemic half-grown cockroach from a glazed tile wall with it.

Gran'ma Lynch was born Sarah Catherine Ragland. The Raglands were of Welsh extraction. Her great-great-great-grandparents, John Ragland and Ann Beaufort, were married in Wales and moved to Virginia about 1720. Gran'ma was a beautiful brunette and some of her children were the first brown-eyed Lynches within memory. My mother was one of her children that had brown eyes. Most Lynches to this day have blue eyes.

Gran'ma Lynch was very sweet and gentle; she was also a woman of great fortitude and physical bravery. She was an excellent horsewoman. That is, she was a very skillful horseback rider. She told me once about how, during the War, she swam her saddle mare across a flooded stream with one of her babies in her arms, followed by a slave on another horse, carrying her oldest son, Sam Henry Lynch. When my mother, who was also an excellent horseback rider (side saddle, of course) would mount her horse 'Prince' to ride to DeLay to get the mail, Gran'ma would caution her to be very careful, then worry about her after she had gone. I would say, "Gran'ma you know that Momie is a good horseback rider, why are you so uneasy? You are also accustomed to riding horseback."

She would answer, "Yes, but I was the best horsewoman in Mississippi."

Prince was a beautiful white horse, a single footer, and with that gait he went like the

wind. When I would sometimes go with her on another horse, I would have to ride at full gallop to keep up with her when Prince was single-footing.

We once owned a mare that was a gentle saddlehorse, but would go wile if anyone opened an umbrella while riding her. Momie tried several times to accustom her to an umbrella. She was unable to do so, and one day, when it looked as if it would rain, she wouldn't take an umbrella and explained why. Earl Lynch, her nephew, who was about Momie's age, scoffed at the idea and at Momie's invitation, mounted side saddle to demonstrate that he could ride her the while he opened an umbrella. He opened the umbrella, had to drop it and was barely able to keep his seat before he brought the mare under control. We all, including Gran'ma and Gran'pa, laughed heartily at Earl's expense. Momie then took charge of the mare, mounted and went on her way to DeLay, sans umbrella.

Many times Gran'ma Lynch would entertain my brothers and me with stories such as Robinson Crusoe, Jack and the Beanstalk, and others. When she told us those tales, my sister had not at that time been born; however, I'm sure Gran'ma related them to her when she was a little girl. A short, short, short story, one of my favorites, was "The Little White Thing." Gran'ma said: "On one cold winter night I heard a voice crying, 'I'm so cold and hungry.'"

We would chorus, "What was it, Gran'ma?" and she would say, "I looked out of my window and I saw a little white thing running around and around the house on the snow crying, 'I'm so cold and hungry.'"

Of course we children would ask again what it was, and Gran'ma would look very mysterious and reply, "It was just a little white thing that ran around and around the house on the snow crying, 'I'm so cold and hungry.'"

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I know, of course, Marcia, that although you and your children, Richard, Lisa, and Karen, are just as curious about what it was as I ever was, and still am for that matter, but all I can tell you is what Gran'ma told me, "that it was just a little white thing that ran around and around the house on the snow crying, 'I'm so cold and hungry.'"

She related one experience, a very unpleasant one, that involved Union soldiers who came to her house while Gran'pa was away fighting as a soldier for the Confederacy. She said they were looking for gold money, silver money, or any article made of either of those metals. Finding none either in coin, rings, earrings, or the like, they killed and carried away what chickens and hogs they could catch. Cattle and horses they could find, they drove away. Gran'ma told me that the man in charge of the marauding band bent over a trunk he was searching for valuables in, and so doing, exposed a pistol, a cap and ball Navy .36 revolver he carried in a holster on his belt, and it was so readily available to her hand, that she was sorely tempted to take it and kill him, but did not, because she knew she could not kill the rest of the party in her house and yard. I have always felt that her desire to shoot the scavenger, vandal, robber, or whatever other name you, my child, and my grandchildren, might deem proper, as well as the restraint she exercised, was a tribute to her courage and an example of her excellent judgment. As bad and as low as those men were, they were not as low as the Yankee General Sherman, who was in command of the infamous "March Through Georgia." That was our family's opinion. It is my opinion still. They, the soldiers who visited Gran'ma, did not burn down the house or barns, nor did they physically molest Gran'ma or her children. Some who read this may say, "A Reactionary's Bringing-up of Ancient Happenings, Long Past and Best

Forgotten,” yes and no. I maintain and I believe that an ancient wrong is just as dastardly as a present one. Remember that, although we are Christians, we are commanded to forgive our enemies and those who trespass against us! I don’t recall where we are told to forget. To forget wrongs done your own people is to forget them, and in this life, I can forget neither. My grandparents, as were my parents, were wonderful people who still live in my memory and in spirit. All that is good in my character I owe to them and all that is bad about me (and there is plenty) I blame myself for, and only myself.

My grandfather Lynch wouldn’t tell us ‘tales’ (our word for stories), he would insist that he knew none, but once after much importuning, said that he did know one and would say, “Well, one time there was an old man and an old woman, and they both loved chicken soup.” He would pause a moment, then say, “But I’ve told that one.”

“No, no, Gran’pa, tell us that one,” we would plead.

He would smile and reply, “Well, alright, one time there was an old man and an old woman and they both loved chicken soup.” He would pause a moment while he waited expectantly, then his blue eyes would twinkle, and he would say, “But I know I’ve told that tale before.”

After several repetitions, we would finally realize that “One time there was an old man and an old woman and that they both loved chicken soup,” was all there was to it, the beginning, the middle, and the end of the tale.

While I am relating fond memories of my mother’s parents, I will tell of what Gran’ma considered to be, or pretended to consider to be a scandalous act of Gran’pa’s during their courtship. What prompted her to tell about it was the result of a question I asked her one day. I asked her if Gran’pa ever kissed her before they were married. Gran’pa, in interested listener, answered, “Yes, the second time I went courting her.” Gran’ma admitted that he had indeed kissed her on that occasion, but had done so by a trick of which she was the innocent victim.

“He told me,” Gran’ma said, “Sally, you are a very pretty girl - but you do have a very unusual face, your eyes are further apart than your face measures from your hair line on your forehead to you chin, and to prove it to me he took a white silk handkerchief from his coat pocket and used it to measure from my forehead to my chin and then he held it across my eyes and when I couldn’t see, he kissed me and I gave him a lecture. I was very angry.” I was about twelve years old when I asked her the question, but, young as I was at the time, I realized that Gran’pa’s daring act did his suit no harm, as they were married soon after when Gran’pa was eighteen years old and she was fifteen, or, as she always insisted, “going on sixteen.”

Gran’pa kept a diary of the things that happened each day, from the days of his courtship of Gran’ma and all through their lifetimes until shortly before his death - every day, except for the time spent as a soldier during the Civil War, The diary contained such items as “Day broke clear, cloudy in afternoon, rained after summer.” “Sun rose clear, then went back to bed. Will rain sometime during the day.” “Lightning in the north, a sign of rain,” etc. Other entries told of the day of each year when the picking of cotton began. What he paid hands per CWT for picking cotton. What he sold the cotton for per pound. How many bales were made on his land and so on. One entry in his diary lives in my memory as vividly as if I saw it tonight in neon lights. “Evan (Gran’ma’s brother) came by this morning. Richard was in the front yard and Evan rode up and hailed him and asked if Old Man Lynch was at home. Richard said, “My Gran’pa is at home.” Evan and I heard Richard telling his Mama and his Gran’ma that he was going to mash Uncle Evan down in the fishpond, because he called my Gran’pa, Old Man Lynch!”

Those dozens of books that contained his life-time diary was burned when my parents

house burned many years later. A great loss. To me his diary was an ever fresh and living link with a time that is gone. A time that lives in my memory; a time of tender joy and intimate laughter shared, now remembered with quiet tears.

Also lost in some manner was a novel written by Gran'ma, the title of which was "The Walnuts." I remember nothing more about it. I never saw it, but I remember hearing Gran'ma speak of it. What became of it, I've not the faintest memory.

At this point in my narrative I will go forward five years to tell of the birth of my sister, Sarah Catherine Ragland Eskridge. By that time I was age twelve years and possessed of sufficient worldly knowledge to know that doctors did not get new babies by searching around in the woods until they found one in a hollow stump, as they did at the time of the births of my brothers (or so I was given to understand at the time) and which method I was simple-minded enough to believe, completely.

She, my sister, was born in the house of Gran'pa and Gran'ma Lynch. As she was the first and only daughter of my mother and father, she was most welcome to all of us. She was a beautiful child of an affectionate and sunny disposition, and she made herself more welcome and loved as time passed. She is still living today, thank God, and I love her as I always have and always will. I also love and like her husband, George L. Eatman, a retired colonel of the U. S. Army, also her two children, a son and a daughter, are very dear to me.

My mother had two sisters older than herself. Both were still living when Amanda and I were married, and she met them both. They lived to be very old. They were both in the nineties when they died. I loved them both dearly, and they both loved me. I knew their children, my first cousins, except for Aunt Blanche's oldest son, Van A. Webster, who died before I met him. I was more intimately acquainted with Aunt Ada's children, as we grew up together, more or less in the same locality. Of all her children, I loved her youngest daughter, Martiree, best, as we were very near the same age. I think I was born about a month before she was born. Aunt Ada was younger than Aunt Blanche, but they were both older than my mother, by twenty years or more. She (my mother) also had two brothers, Samuel Henry Lynch and Robert Jefferson Lynch. Samuel Henry Lynch was the first born and first son of Gran'ma and Gran'pa Lynch. He died when he was about seventeen years of age of typhoid fever. Robert Jefferson Lynch, their second son, married a Goforth; I cannot recall her given name. The both died young. 'Jeffy' is what Gran'pa and Gran'ma called him. His sons, Clyde, Earl, and Elbert, were younger than my mother, though Clyde, I believe, was only a little younger than my mother.

As related before in this narrative, Gran'pa and Gran'ma's oldest son and first born, died in his teens unmarried. Gran'pa would occasionally call me Sam Henry. Sometimes he would correct himself by saying, "I mean Richard," sometimes he wouldn't realize that he had called me Sam Henry, and I never reminded him of his calling me by that name. I knew then, as I know to this day, that of all his grandsons, I was his favorite. Not that he loved me more. Yet I always knew that I had a very special place in his heart. Although he was 65 years of age when I was born, he taught my brother, Jamie, and me how to swim, and at 73 he was a strong swimmer. He could also outrun me when he wished. He taught me to shoot, then gave me a single barrel shot gun, 12 gauge with a 36 in barrel. I was twelve years old at the time. I followed Gran'pa's instructions to the letter, and I've never had an accident with a gun. That is not exactly true, as I did discharge, I'd let the shot gun Gran'pa gave me, but, as I was aiming it at a squirrel at the time I killed it and no harm was done to anyone except the squirrel - and the stock slipped, or rather, kicked back under my arm and the hammer gave me a bloody nose. My brother, Jamie, shot or fired that gun, his first experience with one, and it kicked him down his full length on the

ground. He was only nine and a half years old at the time. He had forgotten to hold the stock back hard against his shoulder. The gun was full choke and the shells at that time were loaded with black (not smokeless) powder, and that made a shot gun kick - hard. Jamie and I both laughed, but he continued to shoot as long as I would give him shells.

In those days guns, except for military rifles, had hammers. One could look at a gun from some yards away and tell if the hammers were a full or half-cock. If the hammers were at full cock, the gun was ready to shoot if one pulled the trigger or triggers, depending upon which it was, a double or single barreled gun. We, when hunting, always carried them at half cock for safety. When we were ready to shoot, we would pull back the hammer, aim and fire. If the gun had two barrels, it had two triggers and two hammers. The right hammer and front trigger were for the right hand barrel, and the left hammer and back trigger were for the left hand barrel. A double was of no advantage to me, as I invariably shot only the right hand barrel, so I never cocked both hammers. I either got my game with that right hand barrel, or it was gone before I could cock the other hammer and find the back trigger. My father was a champion shot gunner and bird (quail) hunter and always cocked both hammers and almost invariably would bring down two birds when a covey of birds took wing. I never, or almost never, got even one bird in that situation, because before I could make up my mind which bird to shoot at they were all out of range. Popie, as we called our father, would laugh and tell people that, "Richard had bad luck on the first rise (when a covey got up) because a bird would fly between me and the one I was aiming at, so I wouldn't shoot." The joke was that a good shot gunner in such a lucky situation would have fired and got both birds. When we would walk up (flush) one bird, I could almost always bring him down. Birds are always shot, or shot at, while on the wing (flying).

One day when we were very young, Jamie, Herman, Hodge, and I were hunting squirrels. Jamie saw a squirrel and determined to get him, cocked both hammers on a ten gauge double, but couldn't get a clear shot as the squirrel got away before he could shoot. Jamie forgot to let the hammers down and sometime later we stopped. Herman and I sat down on the trunk of a fallen tree. Jamie remained standing behind us. He accidentally touched both triggers, not realizing that the hammers were at full cock, and both barrels discharged, and the twin loads passed just between me and Herman, making a hole in the ground you could put your foot in. It gave all three of us a big scare, Jamie more than either Herman or me. Jamie threw the gun down and took his other shells he had left and threw them down as well. I had to carry my gun and the 10 gauge Jamie was using as well as all the shells home. He, Jamie, wouldn't touch any kind of gun again for some time after. I relate the above, not because it is interesting particularly, but so that those who read it may profit by being extremely careful when handling guns of any kind.

Gran'pa Lynch was disturbed and disgusted because I started going to school late. I was eight years old at the time. What annoyed Gran'pa was that Uncle Jim Lancaster was very proud of his grandson, J. T. Denton, who was about the same size as myself, although a year or two older, was already in the second grade. J. T.'s grandmother was my great aunt Elizabeth Eskridge Lancaster. Every time Uncle Jim would get within speaking distance, he would ask Gran'pa, "What grade is Richard in at school?" knowing, of course, that I had not even started going to school, and would add, "J. T. Is already in the second grade."

Gran'pa would answer shortly, "Richard hasn't started to school."

The exchange related above would, as Gran'pa said, "Vex" him, and he told me, "By George, Richard, the day you catch up with J. T., when you are in the same grade with him, I'll give you a twenty dollar gold piece."

Popie, my father, secretly amused by Gran'pa's concern, came in a few days later and

gave me a first, second, and third reader, a spelling book, a very elementary arithmetic, a little geography and an elementary history. Because I could at the time read quite well, add and subtract some, could tell time by the clock, etc. Gran'pa was delighted. I read the readers, the third giving me but little more trouble than the first or second, read the history book. Popie and Momie taught me the problems in the little arithmetic, and Gran'ma taught me to spell - even such words as 'separate.' I think I could spell as well or better when the school started that fall as I can now, which was no great feat, as I can't spell worth a damn to this day. I would read the "Oxford Eagle," a weekly newspaper published to this day in Oxford, Mississippi, the "Atlanta Constitution," also a weekly in those long ago days, published in Atlanta, Georgia, a big daily now, also the "Memphis Commercial Appeal," also a weekly, now a large daily newspaper. I would, of course, have to ask Gran'pa what a lot of the words meant and how to pronounce them. I did not catch J. T. that year, but I did the next, and it could have been said of Gran'pa at the time, "His cup runneth over" he, of course, gave me a twenty dollar gold piece of which I was extremely proud. In those days all one had to do to get a one, five, ten, or twenty dollar gold piece was to go to any bank with "Greenback" (paper money) and exchange it for its equivalent in gold coin or coins.

Two women taught every grade from first to eighth in the school at Delay. I remained a student at that school until I had finished the eighth grade, and Jamie and I finished high school at Tula, Mississippi. It was three miles from Gran'pa and Gran'ma's house to the village of Tula, Mississippi. We rode back and forth every day on horseback. On bad, stormy afternoons that lasted into the evening, we would spend the night with our cousin, Eunice Lyles and her husband, Dr. S. T. Lyles and their children, stabling our horses in the doctor's barn.

After graduating from high school, I worked until I was eighteen, then on the first of September 1918, I was matriculated as a freshman student at the University of Mississippi and at the same time enlisted with the approval of my parents in the Student Army Training Corps, the Army of the United States for the duration of the War, my salary as a soldier, or a reasonable facsimile there of being \$21.00 per month. At this point in my narrative, I wish the reader to understand that "I dreamed no dreams," neither did I "see any visions" of myself as the recipient of any medals or citations earned under fire on battlefields for gallantry or bravery. On the contrary, I sincerely doubted my bravery and wondered where one could find the courage to perform with credit under fire.

Several years prior to my enlistment, and before the U. S. was a participant, Gran'pa Lynch told me that our country would be engaged in that war, that it would not end as soon as the experts predicted, and that I would be a soldier before it ended. During that conversation, I stated the apprehensions above related and asked him in all sincerity if he thought I would run away because of fright when bullets sang around me. He smiled and assured me that I would not run, but stand and do my duty. He said that being with my comrades in arms would bolster my courage in no small degree. He explained that I would know I was in danger, that no one but a fool would feel otherwise, but that I would find the courage to do my duty to my comrades and my country. I might say at this time that that was the only time I ever doubted Gran'pa's judgment and then only because I feared that I knew my own shortcomings better than he did. I was afraid that his love for me prejudiced him in my favor, but, nevertheless, I found comfort in his assurance. O Brave Spirit, Gran'pa. His prophecy was proven correct insofar as the length of the war was concerned. He had been dead several years at the time of my enlistment, but his words were fresh in my memory then as now, and were a source of comfort. I had asked him, because I knew that he had had his baptism of fire. I don't recall bringing the subject of my



courage (or the lack of it) up to any other member of my family, and to my considerable surprise, neither did my family, i.e., parents, brothers, or sister, at least none of them did in my presence. As it turned out, World War One ended, soon after my enlistment, and here may I most sincerely say that the lost opportunity to prove myself a hero never prompted any feeling of regret on my part.

Gran'daddy Eskridge was happy and gratified to see me in the uniform of my country. I enjoyed his pleasure and pride in me, but I never shared his enthusiasm. He told me how he had longed to participate as a soldier of the Confederacy during the Civil War and how bitterly he had resented the fact that he extreme youth kept him out of it. His daddy, James Ira Eskridge, served with distinction in McCullah's brigade. Gran'daddy was very proud of his father's record.

Gran'daddy never went in for much levity; I never believed him to be a happy man. He was dour, of stern mien, and when I was a small boy, in his company (which I avoided when possible as I would have avoided exposure to the plague) he usually maintained a complete silence and his indifference was almost glacial. That, of course, was partly my fault, because I had not the sense (nor the inclination) to cultivate his better acquaintance, as a small boy. When I grew older and was able to understand his unhappiness I told him one day when I was about fifteen years of age that I had feared him more as a small boy that I feared the devil. He appeared to be surprised, even a little hurt and asked me why. I answered that it was because I knew him or mistakenly thought I did, but had no personal acquaintance with the devil. That confidence broke the ice between us, and thereafter, I grew very fond of him, and he of me. There was one of several incidents that he told me about, that would always be told with laughter by both of us. It was as follows.

I will here tell of Gran'daddy's elation and delight upon the occasion of my only sister's birth. It was one of the few times that I can recall that he seemed both happy and in high good humor. He sat down with me and set forth many blessings accruing to me as a lad of near-thirteen years of age in the good fortune of having a baby sister. He became poetic in his rejoicing in having at last a granddaughter. He then set forth all the obligations of an oldest brother to a sister, especially a sister so much younger than himself. I remember thinking during that conversation that I had possibly been wrong in my belief that he, Gran'daddy, looked upon small boys, not as a necessary, but as an unnecessary evil. It then appeared to me that Gran'daddy did in all truth regard me with some favor and see in me an object of some usefulness even if my chief reason for being, consisted in the main, to function as a fond protector of my baby sister. I also remember being somewhat puffed up with my own importance in that new responsibility, and felt that I had earned a great deal of esteem in the attitude of my paternal grandparent. I do believe that it was during that lecture by Gran'daddy that I got some understanding of his unhappiness, his melancholy, because I remembered that death had deprived him of a baby daughter born to him and Gran'ma Eskridge, born after my father. Certainly I had evidence to support that conclusion, because an enlarged photograph of that daughter stood on a frame as did the enlargements of photographs of his father and mother and his grandfather in one of the rooms on the second floor of his house. I do believe that the death of that, his only daughter, was a grief, a trauma from which he never completely recovered, even until the day of his death. I later became more sure that my conclusion was correct, because during the final years of his life, I discovered, with some surprise and some self-reproach, that I had lacked the insight to realize the extent and the depth of his character and his extreme sensitivity.

On another occasion, when we lived in the house of my great-grandfather and

grandmother Eskridge, we had a Christmas party years before my sister's birth, with the music furnished for the affair by a string trio, Hanse, Green, and Buddy, three Negroes. Hanse played the fiddle or violin, Green the second violin, the harmony, and during one quick and lively number that would make anyone pat his foot, the tune and a drink or two of whiskey lifted Gran'daddy out of his usual taciturnity to the extent that he danced a very well executed jig of about a minute's duration. He got a round of hearty applause and many requests for an encore, but he refused to oblige. He was, I assure you, his great and great-great-grandchildren, more than just ordinarily good as a tap dancer; he also had a perfect ear for pitch. He, Gran'daddy Eskridge, could tune any stringed instrument starting from top note to bottom, or vice-versa, or begin in the middle and go either way. When he finished, it was perfectly tuned to concert pitch. In tuning a violin most people tune the "A" string first, then the other three in correct relation to the "A" string. Not many people can do that, that is tune to a concert pitch, even most piano tuners work from the pitch of a tuning fork. Gran'daddy, had he been a piano tuner, would have had no need for such. Gran'daddy told me that as a youngster he wished to learn the printers trade, and afterwards to edit and publish his own newspaper. He also told me that he greatly enjoyed smoking cigars. Knowing that he never had smoked in my presence, I asked why he didn't smoke cigars since he was so fond of them. He answered that it was "because the odor of burning tobacco is so offensive to my wife, your grandmother."

It was true, his reason for abstinence where smoking cigars was concerned, because any kind of tobacco smoke was nauseating to Gran'ma Eskridge, be it from cigarette, pipe, or cigar.

I will tell here of an incident that demonstrated her aversion and repugnance toward tobacco smoke: one day, someone was looking for George Hill, one of her nephews, and asked us in Gran'ma Eskridge's presence, if any of us had seen him that day, and none of us had, but Gran'ma Eskridge spoke up and said that he had passed there at about nine o'clock that morning.

"Which way was he headed, Lizzie?" asked Uncle D. U. Lancaster, her brother-in-law, husband of Gran'daddy's sister, Aunt Hannah.

"Which way was he going?" someone else asked.

"I don't know," answered Gran'ma, "I was in the back yard."

"Then, how do you know, Lizzie? How do you know, because if you didn't see him, you couldn't know he passed."

"I smelled his old pipe," she said.

Later inquiries revealed that he had indeed passed at the time Gran'ma had said that he did. She and Gran'daddy lived at that in Delay, high up on a hill, a quarter mile from the road where he passed.

Gran'daddy died the spring following the end of World War One. When he was so ill, I was given a leave from the University, so that I might stay with him and help Gran'ma during his last illness. Had my mother not been in a poor state of health and my father's duties at the University not been so demanding, he instead of me, would have been there with him and Gran'ma. I explained the situation to him, and he said, "All things are dependent on circumstance, my son. I understand."

My father did manage to get out once or twice each week to see him. It was not possible for him to be there more often.

One day, while talking with him, I sensed his regret that he never had been baptized. I asked him if he would like me to arrange for his baptism. He said that he would, but that the weather being quite cold at the time, that no minister would do it. You must understand that to be baptized to him meant complete immersion. I told him that it would be no problem, as we could

have Mr. Whitehead build an oblong box or baptistry, fill it with warm water, and have him given the sacrament of baptism, in the enclosed hallway of his house.

Popie and I did as I planned, and Gran'daddy was happy that he had as he expressed it, "Carried out the Commandment." Popie did not believe that baptism was essential to salvation and told Gran'daddy that he didn't, that he (Gran'daddy) had lived an honorable, moral, and upright life all his days. However, Gran'daddy wanted it, so we arranged it as planned, and I've always been glad that we complied with his wish, for I know he died with more peace of spirit than he would have, had we not arranged for his wish to be fulfilled.

A few minutes before he died, I was sitting beside him, and he told me, "The is the end, Richard."

Believing that he was indeed dying, I took his hand in mine and told him not to be afraid.

He answered, "I do not fear death, my son, but death hath its sting." He then asked me to call Gran'ma and Mr. Whitehead who were at the time in the next room, which I did and when they came in, he told me to go for a walk in the orchard, that they would call me when "I have finished my task," as he expressed it.

To me at the time, his wish that I leave the room during his passing, was both strange and sad. I have since come to believe that out of consideration for my youth and sensitivity he wished to spare me witnessing his final, sad, mortal act. Although at the time I did not understand, today I'm sure that his compassion for a grandson he loved and one he knew loved him, prompted his last request.

My walk, which might better be described as a wait, was but of very few minutes duration. Mr. Whitehead, an old friend of Gran'daddy's, very shortly afterwards came to me and told me that my Gran'daddy had passed away in peace. The day after the day following his death, we laid him to rest in the liberty graveyard near the graves of his parents.

Marcia, my daughter, I know that you remember my having shown you his final mortal resting place, or at least where his mortal remains were buried.