

## Matthew Calbraith Butler.

(By James Henry Rice, Jr.)

General Butler is a subject in which Lord McCaulay would have reveled. Indeed part of McCaulay's matchless talent was expended on the dukes of Ormond, to whom the Butlers claim kinship.

While the late George D. Tillman may have stretched things a bit far in terming General Butler "the best blooded man in America," in blurring out in the constitutional convention of 1895, yet "it would be a long time before the equal of M. C. Butler in intelligence and patriotism would sit in the United States senate," it is still true that his lineage is illustrious; his patriotism without taint. Men of his race have won distinction in every crisis of American history. Their women have shone with charm of manner, grace of mind and beauty of person in the highest stations of America's social realm.

Matthew Calbraith Butler was the son of Dr. William Butler and his wife, Jane Tweedy (Perry). He was born on Lowndes, and Butler Hill some four miles from Greenville.

Dr. William Butler again was the second son of General William Butler and his wife, Behethland Moore Foote Butler.

There clusters romance about Dr. William Butler's marriage. Graduating at South Carolina college, he rode horseback to Philadelphia, in company with a man named Hill, from Wilkes county, Ga. Remaining at Philadelphia until graduating, he rode back home to Greenville. While assistant surgeon in the navy, and walking the deck of his ship anchored in the harbor of Newport, R. I., he saw a young girl promenading by. It was a case of love at first sight, and they were shortly married in New York City, at the house of Commodore Matthew Calbraith Perry, an older brother of Commodore Oliver Hazard Perry, who gained the famous victory on Lake Erie over the British.

Dr. Butler and his 16 year old bride came South on horseback and settled on the family plantation over the river from Saluda Old Town (now Saluda). Four children born here all died of malaria, which raged like a pestilence in the up country at that time.

Thereupon Dr. Butler moved to the place near Greenville with his wife, where 12 more children were born to them. Gov. B. F. Butler was fond of telling about Mrs. Butler. He wrote a sketch of her, from which and from divers other accounts, she must have been a woman of rare charm and force of character. Having been appointed agent to the Cherokee Indians by President Polk, Dr. Butler traveled across country to Fort Gibson, Ark., then the nearest point to civilization. His work lay in Indian territory, now Oklahoma. He died in 1850 and his son, George, was appointed agent in his stead.

Judge A. P. Butler of Edgefield and Comdr. M. C. Butler both asked for a boy to educate and adopt. The choice fell on Matthew Calbraith Butler, who arrived in Edgefield on a cold bleak November day, described as "a little sickly pickle-faced boy" with only a grip. William Pulasiki Butler, a merchant at Edgefield, fitted him out in clothes and sent him out to his uncle at Shorelands, five miles from Edgefield. Here he enjoyed the motherly influence of Judge Butlers' mother, Behethland Moore Foote Butler, one of the heroines of the Revolution.

Going to South Carolina college, Butler left during the "Rebellion" and took up the study of law under his uncle, Judge A. P. Butler. It was on this trip to Judge Butler's plantation that, in passing through Edgefield, he stopped at "Edgewood" and met his future wife, a daughter of Colonel Francis Wilkinson Pickens, later Governor Pickens of South Carolina. There was an affair on at once, for Calbraith Butler made love as he fought and spoke, going straight at it. Colonel Pickens, however, quite a wealthy man, objected on the score of the young man's poverty. This recalls General Butler's own account when somebody in Washington said one day: "General, I understand that your family in South Carolina was one of great wealth before the war." "They lied on us," said the general, without moving a muscle, "the Butlers blacked their shoes and went with the good folks; but none of them had any money."

All through his life, whatever else may be said, General Butler was wholly without pretense. Gentlemen always are. It is the son of an overseer of a mushman that puts on airs.

Although objecting to the match, Colonel Pickens was soon to have trouble enough of his own. He had been twice widowed. His first wife, Eliza Simkins, daughter of Hon. El-

dred Simkins, a pupil of Moses Waddell, at Willington, and later immortalized by Calbraith Butler made love as the Family Provided for; his second wife was Marion Deering of Athens, Ga.

Here fate took a hand in the affairs of Mathew Calbraith Butler, as it did several times afterward.

Colonel Pickens was getting ready for the trip to White Sulphur Springs in Virginia. He was heading straight into danger, although he little reckoned it. He rounded up old Harper, the coachman, old Mose Wallace, baggage wagon negro, Henry Crooker, footman and gate opener, and Robert, a small boy, who had Dolly, the saddle mare, hitched to the buggy. In June, 1857, the cavalcade began its journey to the springs, resting and relaying at Columbia, Charlotte, Raleigh, Richmond, and other places, until they landed at White Sulphur Springs for the late summer.

In his plans for business and politics the coming fall, all fully matured, Colonel Pickens failed to include Lucy Holcombe; but there she was, standing right across his plans! Radiant, glorious, with the sunshine of the prairies on her brow and the roses of Virginia in her cheeks, and queenliest woman known to America's history, she was destined to stirke dumb all beholders in that center of female loveliness, St. Petersburg of the Tsars.

Forty years after this event, I stood before her at Edgewood, as she handed me a life of her distinguished husband inscribed with her name, and the royalty had not left her, a woman that called up Byron's lines: "Who hath not felt his sinking heart and lips confess

The might, the majesty of loveliness"

Colonel Pickens went down "all in a heap." He was done for. The radiant beauty hearkened to his wooing this far. She consented on one condition only. He must secure an ambassadorship. Now what is an ambassadorship between friends?

Colonel Pickens and James Buchanan sat side by side in congress. They were close friends, and friendship has always figured in the Butler annals.

Colonel Pickens went to Buchanan at once and got what he wanted, the ambassadorship to St. Petersburg; but this was not all. His plantations were on his hands. They had to be looked after. Perhaps somebody close to him and interested vitally in Calbraith Butler spoke to him on the subject! Anyway he told his daughter that she might now marry that poor, but handsome and brilliant, young Butler, who could look after things while he was away. Then he rushed out to Texas and married his lady love, taking her forthwith to St. Petersburg with John E. Bacon, chief secretary, and Franklin J. Moses, assistant—the Governor Moses of the plunder days.

Early in 1858 Matthew Calbraith Butler and Maria Simkins Pickens were married and their first son, now Dr. F. W. P. Butler, of Columbia, says he "discovered America on December 8, 1858." (Named for his grandfather, Francis Wilkinson Pickens.)

Now we come to Butler, the man. Some time before his marriage, my father told me, he was passing up Main street in Greenville, when a young man walked out of the old Mansion house, with a cape flung carelessly over his shoulder, and a sporting stick in his hand. It was the most superb type of physical manhood he had ever beheld, and he asked the first passerby who was the young man. "Oh! that is young Calbraith Butler."

The same impression was made on the French ambassador at the Yorktown celebration in 1881. When asked to pick out the most distinguished man in that gathering, where distinguished men from every country under the sun were thick as hops, he pointed out Gen. M. C. Butler, without a minute's hesitation. Even to the last he would be selected anywhere by anybody as the most distinguished man in any assemblage of men. In 1859 he was elected to the legislature, but on the outbreak of war he entered service as captain of the Edgefield Hussars. In a year he was colonel of the Second South Carolina regiment. At the head of his regiment he lost a leg at Brandy Station, June 9, 1863. Returning to the front as soon as he could mount a horse, and with his wound unhealed, he was made a brigadier, and, in August, 1864, he became a major general at the age of 27.

In the memorial address of the Veterans' Association of the District of Columbia, it is said:

"Well might it be said of him, when he mounted for a fray, that the steed knew his master, for one who was a master sat upon the steed. The arched neck our Scripture clothes

with thunder was a likeness of the rider's mettle. Horse and horseman ride before us as the beau ideal of what the mind represents itself as chivalry, as knighthood. Not often have the heavens bestowed a face and form of more natural fascination, the more fascinating that one saw therein a natural grace "beyond the reach of art." The grace was an added fascination to the prowess that so dauntlessly leaped forth."

Butler's last battle, the raid on Kilpatrick's camp, just a month before the Confederacy collapsed, is panegyricized by Edward L. Wells as one of the finest actions in history.

His appearance at the battle of Brandy Station is thus described:

"Moulded like an Apollo, with a face as sweet and handsome as that of any god of old, he sat on his horse like a typical South Carolinian, a veritable cavalier, gentle as any woman when comrades were assembled in social converse or around the campfires; fierce as any grenadier when the foe was to be met face to face. He lost with his leg none of that unconquerable dash and suirit that made him a very Paladin in the cavalry corps of the Army of Northern Virginia."

In the storm of battle, as well as in the storm of Reconstruction, General Butler was in his element. He was a man of deathless bravery. I have heard him say, and know it to be true in my time, that he never carried a weapon in his life, except when on duty. At times in 1876, knowing strife to be imminent, he would put a pistol in the buggy, but he carried none on his person.

After the war, when the provisional government had failed and things went from bad to worse, General Butler, like Gen. James Conner and others, thought the best course was a compromise with the better elements of the Republicans in order to save the state. Later, however, when it was determined to make a straight-out fight, there was a conference at the home of Gen. James Conner in Charleston, at which it was agreed that General Hampton would write a letter to General Hampton in Mississippi, offering him the nomination for governor. This he did. The letter brought General Hampton to South Carolina.

When the convention met, one of the most momentous in South Carolina history, General Butler placed General Hampton in nomination in one of the most vivid and eloquent orations ever uttered. The nomination was seconded by Col. Robert Aldrich of Barnwell, in his happiest vein, and seconded again, in a short speech by General M. W. Gary.

How the fight gathered force, with Hampton's firm hand curbing the fiery spirits under him, who wanted nothing better than a fight, and how it swept the state for white supremacy, has been told over and over again.

When the Democrats had gained control of the state the legislature elected General Butler to the United States senate. He was placed in nomination by Joseph Brevard Kershaw. It may well be doubted if any other man could have gained the seat after being elected; nor could General Butler have gained it but for a peculiar incident. Old Simon Cameron of Pennsylvania had known and admired Judge A. P. Butler, General M. C. Butler's uncle, under whom he read law, before the war. So when he noticed a young and handsome man about the capitol, he inquired who was it, and was told that it was "young Butler, just elected senator by the South Carolina legislature and trying to get seated."

Cameron was a power in the Republican party with numerous henchmen scattered over many states. He took a hand in the fray and sent out orders all along the line that Butler must be seated, and he was seated. This was the first of many victories won for the state in the senate. He made friends of the leading Republicans, who were willing and anxious to serve him whenever they could do so without compromising themselves at home. Here is a characteristic example. General Butler asked Blaine: "Jim, you are a fine fellow down here, but how is it you get to be such a blackguard when you are loose in Maine, raving at the South and all that sort of thing?" Drawing close and with his winning smile, Blaine said: "It's politics, my dear fellow, nothing but politics."

As an orator on the stump General Butler had few equals anywhere in the nation and completely discomfited Thomas E. Watson in 1891.

I remember him well in 1876 and heard him speak then and in 1878. It was 1878 that he told the following story, when so many Republicans, Judge Cook among them, wished to seek shelter in the Democratic fold:

Once war raged between beasts

and birds (he did not say animals, as most orators would, showing his nice, instinctive use of language). Led by the lion and the tiger, the beasts gained the upper hand and the bat came out of his cave and hopped around like a mouse, claiming kinship with the beasts. By and by the eagle, the condor and other powerful birds joined the fray and sent the beasts flying, and the bat began to fly around with the birds; but the birds would have none of him and ran him back to his caves, where he still abides. These repentant Republicans, General Butler said, were nothing but bats. We wanted none of them. This swept the crowd.

Whether General Butler could have maintained himself in these frenzied mobs of lunatics, which assemble these days, may be doubted. He was a gentleman, with a gentleman's instinctive loathing for vulgarity, obscenity and filth. In his youth and all during 1876 white men were gentlemen—at least gentlemen predominated, whereas now gentlemen are so scarce at these gatherings as to be not worth re-coming.

But he filled the need of his time. His voice was strong, mellow and powerful. His presence, with its background of military distinction and dauntless courage, was a mighty coadjutor to the eloquence of his words.

During the many delightful conferences at his home in Barnwell, in 1891, where almost nightly Col. Robert Aldrich and myself foregathered, he told me that General Butler was the logical man to run for governor in 1892, stood the best chance of election, although he doubted if he could be elected. "If Butler does not run, he will walk the plank next time any how; but if he runs, he will gain a powerful following and may retain his seat in the senate." Wise and prophetic words by the wisest political philosopher of the generation, albeit a failure in practical politics. It is best, I think, to leave alone this question right now. It can add nothing to the estimate of General Butler. He made a grave political mistake in attempting to win over men, whose help would have amounted to nothing if he said it, and lost thereby the friends of a lifetime.

Seldom indeed does any man possess power to grasp a changing political situation, when he is absent from the scene. It is an old story in political annals.

Instead it will be better to look at another side of his character. When I was making a fight to save the birds of the state and trying to educate our people to the value of them, General Butler gave serious attention to the subject. He would be the last man one would expect attention from on such a subject. He knew nothing of natural history. His life had been away from it; and there was, as there still is, a large body of eminent South Carolinians whose minds can not focus on anything smaller than a horse. Yet Gen. M. C. Butler, cavalier of caavaliers, representing a type that was the wonder and envy of the lesser fry, accumulated all the information he could, wrote me often for more and ended by writing to farmers all over Edgefield county, asking them to come to the court house and hear me explain the value of birds. I went. He introduced me. That was in the summer of 1908, the late summer. After I had spoken, he took up the salient points and drove them home in a magnificent way, then thanked me for coming—perhaps his last public speech.

That afternoon, standing by him at the station, we had a long chat. When the whistle blew, he grasped my hand—he could make the blood run through your veins like wine—and looked me in the eyes. That was my last sight of Matthew Calbraith Butler, most brilliant of all South Carolina cavaliers since William Moultrie sank into an unknown grave.—The State.

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