SOME
OLD HISTORIC LANDMARKS
OF
VIRGINIA AND MARYLAND
DESCRIBED IN
A HAND-BOOK FOR THE TOURIST
OVER THE
WASHINGTON, ALEXANDRIA AND MOUNT VERNON
ELECTRIC RAILWAY.

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ILLUSTRATED.

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These are only the picturings of fancy, and to many they may seem silly and vague, even foolish; but they are picturings which some of us love to linger over, and are bent to let pass from our visions, for they touch responsive chords of our hearts and set them to rhythm and accord with all that belongs to those remote but cherished times; and as the vistas lengthen and grow dimmer we shall but cling to them and lose them all the more.

Scattered over the tide-water region of Virginia are hundreds of such heaps of bricks and stones as those to be seen on the site of the old house of Belvoir we have been describing; and they arrest the attention of the thoughtful passer and tell to him mute but pathetic and impressive stories of the past, of rural mansions of the great Virginiæ estates where culture, refinement, and a generous hospitality abounded. Only a few of the typical old buildings remain for us, and these are passing rapidly from view, and the time is not far distant when the last of these landmarks of the vice-regal and revolutionary times will be no more.

GREENWAY COURT.

Not far from the little village of Millwood, in the Shenandoah Valley, there stood a few years ago an ancient mansion of peculiar interest. It was plainly a relic of the remote past—quaint in style, and suggestive to the beholder of strange circumstances and histories. Tall locusts of a century’s growth surrounded it, and waved their spreading branches over its steep roofs and windows.

This ancient mansion was once the home of an English nobleman, who only chanced to live in Virginia, and did not directly influence in any considerable measure the events of the period in which he was an actor. And what, it may be asked, had Thomas, Lord Fairfax, Baron of Cameron, the sixth of the name, of Greenway Court in the Shenandoah Valley, to do with the history of his era? What did he perform? and why is a place demanded for him in our annals? The answer is not difficult. With this notable person who has passed to his long rest, and lies nearly forgotten in the old church at Winchester, is connected a name which will never be forgotten. His was the high mission to shape in no small measure the immense strength of George Washington. His hand pointed attention to the rising planet of this great life, and opened its career toward the zenith—the planet which shines now the polar star of our liberties, set in the stormy skies of the Revolution. The brilliance of that star no man can now increase nor obscure, as no cloud can dim it,—and yet, once it was unknown, and needed assistance, which Lord Fairfax afforded.

Any account of the youth of Washington must involve no small reference to the old fox-hunting Baron who took an especial fancy for him when he was a boy of sixteen, and greatly aided in developing his capabilities and character. Fairfax not only thus shaped by his counsels the unfolding mind of the young man, but placed the future leader of the American Revolution in that course of training which hardened his muscles, toughened his manhood, taught him self-reliance, and gave him that military repute in the public eye, which secured
GREENWAY COURT.
The home of Thomas, Lord Fairfax, in the Shenandoah Valley.
OF VIRGINIA AND MARYLAND.

for him at a comparatively early age the appointment of commander-in-chief of the Continental armies over all competitors. First and last, Fairfax was the fast and continuing friend of Washington, and not even the struggle for independence, in which they espoused opposite sides, operated to weaken this regard. In imagination let us look at this old house in which Lord Thomas passed about thirty years of his bachelor life. It stands before us on a green knoll,—solitary, almost, in the great wilderness, and all its surroundings impress us with ideas of pioneer life and habits. It is a long, low building, constructed of the limestone of the region. A row of dormer windows stands prominently out from its steep over-hanging roof, and massive chimneys of stone appear outside of its gables which are studded with coops around which swarm swallows and martins. From the ridge of the roof rise two belfries or lookouts, constructed probably by the original owner to give the alarm in case of an invasion by the savages. Not many paces from the old mansion was a small log house in which the eccentric proprietor slept, surrounded by his dogs, of which he was passionately fond; the large edifice having been assigned to his steward. A small cabin of stone near the north end of the house was his office; and in this he transacted all the business of his vast possessions, giving quit-rents, signing deeds, and holding audiences to adjust claims and boundary lines. Scattered over the knoll were the quarters for his many servants. And here in the midst of dogs and horses, backwoodsmen, Indians, half-breeds, and squatters, who feasted daily at his plentiful board, the fine gentleman of Pall Mall, the friend of Joseph Addison, passed more than a quarter of a century. He lived in this frontier locality the life of a recluse. He had brought with him an ample library of books, and these were welcome companionship for him in his solitary hours. Ten thousand acres of land around his unpretentious lodge he had allotted for a manorial estate, with the design at some time of erecting upon it a castle for a residence; this design he never executed.

At the age of twenty-five, Lord Fairfax was one of the gayest of the young men of London society. He went the rounds of dissipation with the fondest enjoyment, and was considered one of the finest beaux of his day. He was well received by all classes. Young noblemen, dissipating rapidly their patrimonial substance, found in him a congenial companion in their intrigues and revels. Countesses permitted him to kiss their jewelled hands; and when he made his bow in their drawing-rooms, received him with their most patronizing smiles. But our young lord after a time found himself arrested in his gay round of pleasures in the haunts of silk stockings and hooped petticoats. He had revolved like a gayly-colored moth about many beautiful luminaries without singeing his wings. But his hour of fate came. One of the beauties of the time transfixed him. He circled in closer and closer gyrations. His pinions were caught in the blaze, and he was a hopeless captive. My Lord Fairfax no longer engaged in revels or the rounds of dissipation, but like a sensible lover accepted the new conditions, and sought only to make everything ready for a life of real happiness in the nuptials of two loving and con-
fiding hearts. He turned resolutely from the frivolous past and looked only to the promising future, which he saw as if unfolding something higher and more substantial for his achievement and enjoyment, and then the real sweetness and depth of his truer nature revealed themselves from beneath the wrappings of dissipation and vice. He gave up everything which had pleased him for this woman; and all that he now asked was permission to take his affianced away from the dangerous atmosphere of the court, and to live with her peacefully as a good nobleman of the provinces. He loved her passionately, and wished to discard all who threatened to interfere with the exclusive enjoyment of her society. All his resources were taxed to supply the most splendid marriage gifts; and absorbed in this delightful dream of love, his happiness was raised to the empyrean. But he was destined to have a sudden awakening from his dream, a terrible, almost fatal fall from his cloudland. He had expended the wealth of his deep and earnest nature on a coquette,—his goddess was a woman simply,—and a very shallow one. She threw Fairfax carelessly overboard, and married a nobleman who won her by the superior attractions of a ducal coronet. Thus struck doubly in his pride and his love, Fairfax looked around him in despair for some retreat to which he might fly and forget in a measure his sorrows. London was hateful to him, the country no less distasteful. He could not again plunge into the mad whirl of the one, nor rest away in the dull routine of the other. His griefs demanded action to dissipate them,—adventure, new scenes, another land were needed. This process of reflection turned the young man's thoughts to the lands in far away Virginia which he held in right of his mother, the daughter of Lord Culpeper, to whom they had originally been granted; and finally he bade adieu to England and came over the seas. Such were the events in the early life of this gentleman which brought him to Virginia.

The house of Belvoir to which Lord Fairfax came was the residence, as has already been stated, of Sir William Fairfax, his cousin, to whom he had entrusted the management of his Virginia lands. Lawrence Washington, the eldest brother of George, had married a daughter of Sir William; and here commences the connection of the already aged proprietor and the boy of sixteen who was to lead the armies of the Revolution. Washington was a frequent inmate of the Belvoir home; and the boy was the chosen companion of the old lord in his hunting expeditions. In the reckless sports of the field the proprietor seemed to find the chief solace for his love-lorn griefs. Time slowly dissipated his despairing recollections, however, and now, as he approached the middle of that century the dawn of which had witnessed so much of his misery, the softer traits of his character returned, and he was to those for whom he felt regard a most delightful and instructive companion. Almost every trace of personal attraction, though, had left him. Upwards of six feet in stature, gaunt, raw-boned, near-sighted, with light gray eyes, and a sharp aquiline nose, he was scarcely recognizable as the elegant young nobleman of the days of Queen Anne. But time and reflection had mellowed his mind, and when he pleased, the old gentleman could enchain his
hearers with brilliant conversation of which his early training and experiences had given him very great command. He had seen all the great characters of the period of his youth, had watched the unfolding of events, and studied their causes. All the social history, the scandalous chronicles, the private details of celebrated personages had been familiar to him; and his conversation thus presented a glowing picture of the past. Something of cynical wit still clung to him, and the fireside of Belvoir was the scene of much satiric comments between the old nobleman and his cousin William. But Fairfax preserved great fondness for youth, and took especial pleasure in the society of our George of Mount Vernon. He not only took him as a companion in his hunts, but liked to have the boy with him when he walked out; and it may be easily understood that the talks of the exile had a deep effect upon young Washington.

The import of Lord Fairfax’s connection with the future commander-in-chief lies chiefly in the commission which he intrusted to the boy of seventeen, that of surveying and laying out his vast possession in the Shenandoah Valley. Providence here as everywhere seemed to have directed the movements of man to work out its own special ends. This employment as surveyor on the wilderness frontiers was the turning-point in the young man’s life, and the results of the expedition of three years in its influences on his habits and character, the information and self-reliance it gave him, and the hardships it taught him to endure are now the property of history.

It is not a part of our design to follow the young surveyor in his expedition which led him from Greenway Court to the headwaters of the Potomac where Cumberland now stands, and thence into the wilderness of the “Great South Branch,” a country as wholly unknown as it was fertile and magnificent. He returned to Mount Vernon a new being, and the broad foundation of his character was laid.

The first act of his eventful life had been played—the early lessons of training and endurance thoroughly learned—the scene of his subsequent exertions fixed; and the prudence, courage, coolness, and determination which he displayed on this arena, made him general in chief when the crisis came, of the forces of the Revolutionary struggle. Lord Fairfax had given him the impetus. From him he received the direction of his genius, and to the attentive student of these early events the conviction becomes more and more absolute that Lord Fairfax was the great “influence” of his life. And the interest attaching to the career of this noble patron consists chiefly in his connection with the life of the rising hero. Having formed as we have seen in no small measure the character of the boy of seventeen he lived to receive the tidings that this boy had overthrown forever the dominion of Great Britain in America on the field of Yorktown. So had Providence decreed; and the gray-haired baron doubtless felt that he was only the humble instrument in that all powerful Hand.

After Yorktown—after the supreme defeat of the proud English general by the lad whom he had trained, it was “time for him to die.”

His death took place in 1781, at the age of ninety-three, and his
body lies buried in the old Episcopal churchyard at Winchester, Va. His barony and its prerogatives according to English law descended in the absence of a son to his eldest brother Robert, who thus became seventh Lord Fairfax. The latter died in Leeds Castle, England, 1791, without a son. The baronial title then fell to Rev. Bryan Fairfax, son of William and brother-in-law of Lawrence Washington. His place was Towson Hall, Mount Eagle, on Hunting Creek, Fairfax County, Va. He died in 1802.

The estate of Greenway Court of ten thousand acres descended to relatives of the proprietor in England. The lodge or mansion, like that of Belvoir on the Potomac, went down in fire.

WOOD LAWN MANSION, THE HOME OF NELLY CUSTIS.

ONE of the most beautiful young women of her time was Eleanor Parke Custis, a granddaughter of Martha Washington and an adopted daughter of General Washington. Her portrait, painted by Gilbert Stuart, was the most attractive picture among the rare paintings at Arlington House, the residence of her brother, George W. Parke Custis, for about fifty years. It is the likeness of a maiden when about eighteen years of age, the admired of all who attended the Republican court during the last year of Washington’s administration.

She is dressed in a plain white garment, in the scant fashion of the day, one of her plump, bare arms forming a conspicuous feature of the picture, her thin resting upon a finger of her gently closed hand. Her sweet face, regular in every feature, is garnished by her dark curls, tastefully clustering around her forehead and temples, while her long hair, gathered in an apparently careless manner on the top of her head, is secured by a cluster of white flowers. The whole picture is modest, simple, beautiful.

"Nelly Custis," as she was called in her maidenhood, was as witty as she was beautiful; quick at repartee, highly accomplished, full of information, a good conversationalist, the life of any company whether young or old, and was greatly beloved by her foster-father, the great patriot. When in June, 1775, Washington was appointed Commander in Chief of the Continental Army, he placed John Parke Custis, the father of "Nelly," on his staff, in which capacity he served during most of the long war that followed. He was aide to Washington at the siege of Yorktown in the autumn of 1781, and was then a member of the Virginia Assembly, but dying that year of fever, his children, George W. Parke Custis and Eleanor Parke Custis, were left orphans, the former nearly three years old and the latter only six months old, and became the adopted children of Washington.

Washington had a favorite nephew, Lawrence, a son of his sister Betty Lewis. He was much at Mount Vernon after Washington’s retirement from the presidency, and the "blessing" of a "good husband" for Nelly when she would "want and deserve one" was bestowed upon her. She and Lawrence Lewis were married February 22, 1799. Many suitors had sought her hand, to be denied for the one whom her