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Passages in the Virginia Legislature

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PASSAGES

IN THE

VIRGINIA LEGISLATURE

From Twenty to Fifty Years Since, &c.

A Mr. Lee, member of the House of Delegates, wore a wig, with a long queue, in the old fashion. A waggish brother member (Roberts of Culpeper) one day saw Lee wriggling in his seat, and trying to catch the speaker's eye, that he might rise and make a speech. R. dexterously tied the queue to the high back of the bench, on which L. sat—and such as all that House sat on, till within the last ten or twelve years. The next moment, a favorable juncture came, and Mr. Lee rose eagerly, exclaiming, "Mr. Speaker!"—but his wig came off; and turning to Roberts he in the same breath cried out, "You're a fool!"

The House roared, of course.

A member, before the convention sat in 1829 to amend the Constitution of Virginia, used to say that he could write a better constitution than the old one, with a fire-coal, upon a board.

When the Virginia school-system (such it is) was under discussion, General Breckenridge wished the disposable funds laid out in a university, and colleges: Mr. Doddridge, in Primary Schools, for teaching rudiments. As they sat together one day in the H. of D., an old member named B * * * * *, making a speech, mentioned "the sov-e-ran-ity of the States." Said Brackenridge aside to Doddridge, "I think that's strong argument in favor of a University." "No," replied D., "I think it is a stronger one for Primary Schools."

Mr. Doddridge was once in the chair; and, there being no business going on, pulled out some bank notes, and began to count them. Gen. Blackburn rose and said, "Mr. Speaker, I move that those *Bills* be laid upon the table." Doddridge hastily huddled his notes into his pocket, and said, "The gentleman from Bath is out of order!"

A bashful member (from Augusta, I think) rose to make his maiden speech, on some local question interesting to his constituents, and began,—

"Mr. Speaker!—What shall I say to my constituents?"—and then, unable to utter another syllable, stood with lips apart, in the mute stupefaction of terror.

Gen. Blackburn, leaning forward in his seat, said in a whisper audible all over the House,—“Tell ’em you tried to make a speech!” The poor victim of bashfulness sunk down upon the bench, and never attempted to speak afterwards.

When the late Governor Barbour was Speaker, a member from a Southside county (whom I shall call Mr. Kyle) rose to speak—unaccustomed—perhaps it was his maiden speech. He was very much in love with the beautiful Miss Fouray, daughter of doctor Fouray, who was also a member. Mr. K. began—

“Mr. Speaker! I rise, freighted with opinions too big for utterance, yet too momentous and too mighty to be suppressed:” [Here Dr. Fouray entered the Hall] “But—yonder comes doctor Fouray!”—and down Mr. K. sat, without further power of utterance. The speaker, willing to relieve his embarrassment and rally his fainting spirit, called out, “Mr. Kyle has the floor!” Mr. K. hereupon rose again and said,

“Mr. Speaker! The grandest thoughts were in my mind, that it ever entered into my soul to conceive: but, sir, to my own grief, and to the great loss of mankind, they were entirely dissipated by the entrance of Doctor Fouray!” He sat down, and spoke no more that session.

¶ The names are feigned, in this anecdote.

Every body knows that Henry made his *debüt* as a lawyer in what is called “The Parsons’ cause,” in the county court of Hanover. One particular passage of that speech is said by his biographer, Mr. Wirt, to have driven the reverend clergy in dismay from the Bench and from the Court-House, where they had assembled in the confident expectation of an easy victory. The following is a part of that passage—reported by Mr. W. N., of Louisa county, whose memory is a store-house of varied and valuable reminiscences. He derived this one from his grandfather, who was an eye-and-ear-witness of the scene:

“Gentlemen of the Jury, do these pretended disciples of Christ obey the precepts and imitate the example of their sacred master Jesus, in feeding the hungry and clothing the naked,—in going about every day, continually doing good? No, no,—far, very far from it! Such is the avarice, such the insatiable thirst for gold, of these ecclesiastical harpies, that they would take the last hoecake from the widow and the orphan, and the last blanket from the lying-in woman!”—