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JOHN BRANCH

1782 - 1863

Governor of North Carolina, United States Senator,
Secretary of the Navy, Member of Congress,
Governor of Florida, etc.

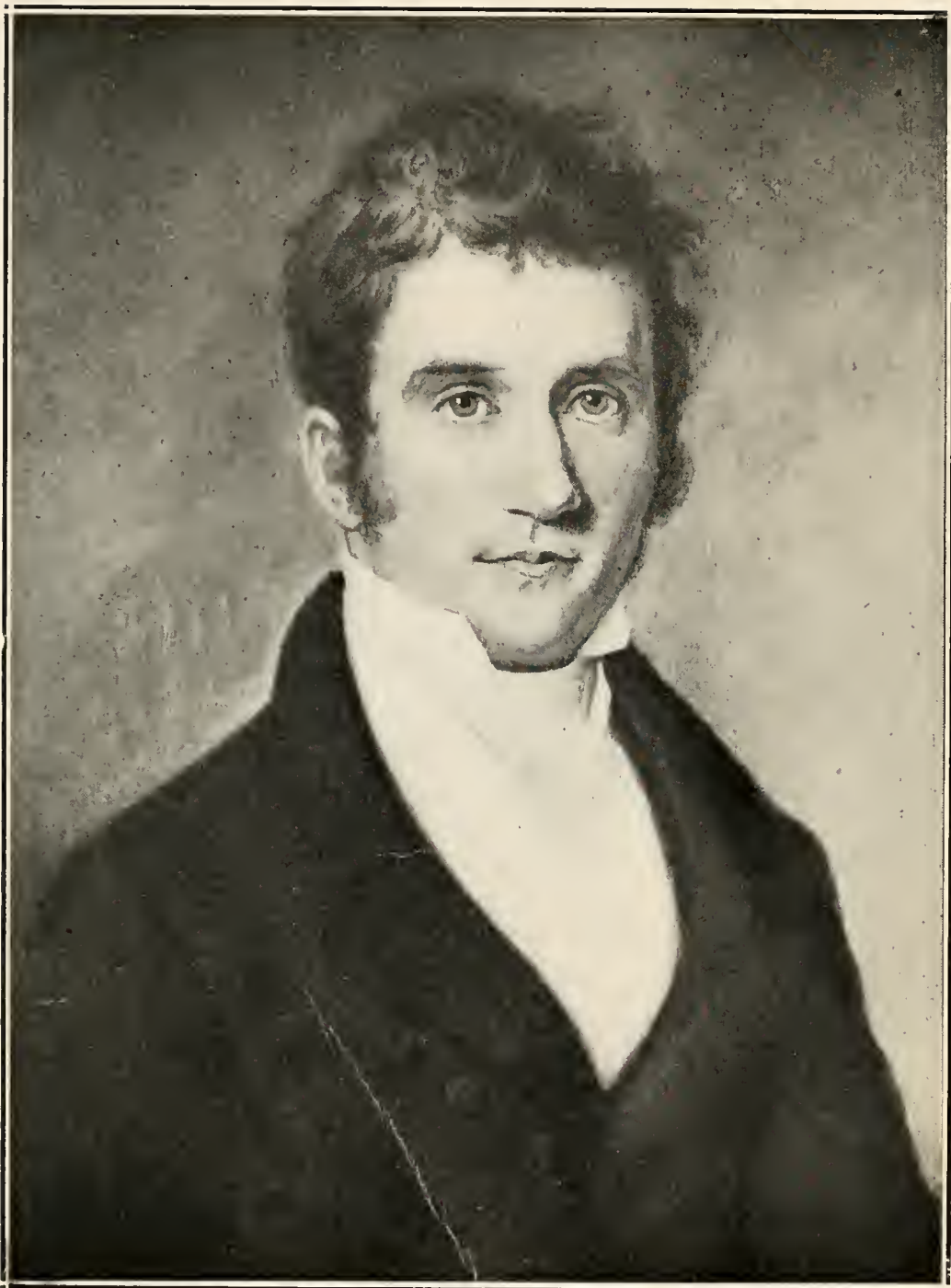
BY

MARSHALL DELANCEY HAYWOOD

Author of "Governor Willism Tryon and His Administration in the Province of North Carolina, 1765-1771," "Lives of the Bishops of North Carolina," "Ballads of Courageous Carolinians," etc.



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BY MARSHALL DELANCEY HAYWOOD,

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Before the office of Secretary of the Navy was created, the functions which were later performed by the occupant of that office devolved upon the Chairman of the Committee on Naval Affairs in the old Continental Congress, and Joseph Hewes, of North Carolina—a Revolutionary statesman, who made his name immortal by signing the Declaration of Independence—was the first person who held that post. Since the Revolution, five North Carolinians have, at different periods of our country's history, entered the President's official family in the capacity of Secretary of the Navy, viz.: John Branch, in the Cabinet of President Jackson; George Edmund Badger, in the Cabinet of the first President Harrison; William Alexander Graham, in the Cabinet of President Fillmore; James Cochran Dobbin, in the Cabinet of President Pierce; and Josephus Daniels (present incumbent), in the Cabinet of President Wilson. It is the purpose of the writer of this sketch to give an account of the distinguished services, both State and National; of the first of these five cabinet officials.

JOHN BRANCH, three times Speaker of the Senate of North Carolina, three times Governor of that State, a member of the United States Senate and National House of Representatives, Secretary of the Navy, member of the North Carolina

Constitutional Convention of 1835, last Governor of the Territory of Florida, and first Acting Governor of the State of Florida, was born in the town of Halifax, in Halifax County, North Carolina, on the 4th day of November, 1782, at a time when his father, Lieutenant-Colonel John Branch, was bravely participating in the War for American Independence, then drawing to a successful close. The services of the Revolutionary patriot, last mentioned, were useful and varied. He was High Sheriff of the County of Halifax at the outbreak of the war; and, while acting in that capacity, was a terror to the Tories in that vicinity. The records of the Committee of Safety tell us that he brought disaffected persons before the committee and "prayed condign punishment upon them." He was a Justice of the Court of Pleas and Quarter Sessions (a tribunal made up of all the magistrates of the county) from December 23, 1776, until after the close of hostilities. On February 11, 1780, he became Lieutenant-Colonel of the Halifax Regiment of North Carolina Militia; and, as such, served for a while in the army of General Greene. In 1781 he was one of the State Auditors for the Halifax District. He was a member of the House of Commons at two sessions during the war, 1781 and 1782; and once in 1788, after the return of peace. He likewise served as a delegate to the Convention of North Carolina which rejected the proposed Constitution of the United States in 1788—he voting with the majority to reject. For many years after the war he held a seat in the Council of State, during the administrations of Governors Richard Dobbs Spaight (the elder), Samuel Ashe, Benjamin Williams, and James Turner. Colonel Branch survived the Revolution nearly twenty-five years. He belonged to the Masonic fraternity and was a member of Royal White Hart Lodge, No. 2, in the town of Halifax. A contemporaneous newspaper announcement of his death said:

"Departed this life, on the 14th of March, 1806, at Elk Marsh, in Halifax County, N. Carolina, Col. John Branch, a soldier of the Revolution. Of this good man, the voice of panegyric is wont to

sound praises in the most exalted strain. As a man, he was brave, open, and ingenuous; as a citizen, active and useful; as a husband, father, and master, he was kind, tender, and affectionate. The child of sorrow found in him a protector; the man of worth, a sincere friend; the poor and needy sought shelter beneath his hospitable roof, and a numerous circle of acquaintances will partake of his glad cheer no more forever. His morning sun was fair and unclouded; its meridian, bright and effulgent; and its descending rays insured him a glorious immortality."

In the Will of Colonel Branch, he left (among other property) to his son Joseph "ten thousand acres of land in the State of Tennessee, on the waters of Duck River." By the same will, Joseph was given a 600-acre tract called "The Cellar," near Enfield. "The Cellar" or "Cellar Field" was afterward owned and occupied by Governor Branch, who probably purchased it from his brother.

Colonel John Branch, Sr., was twice married: first, to Rebecca Bradford (daughter of Colonel John Bradford and his wife, Patience Reed), and left by her the following five children:

I. James Branch, who was twice married and left an only child, who died young, upon which his property (by the terms of his Will) reverted to his brothers and sisters.

II. Martha Branch, who married General Ely Benton Whitaker.

III. John Branch, Jr., subject of the present sketch, who married (first) Elizabeth Foort, and (second) Mrs. Mary Eliza Bond, née Jordan.

IV. Joseph Branch, who married Susan Simpson O'Bryan, and removed to Tennessee, where he died in 1827, at the town of Franklin, leaving (among other children) Lawrence O'Bryan Branch, of North Carolina, who became a Brigadier-General in the Confederate Army, and was killed at the Battle of Sharpsburg, otherwise known as Antietam.

V. Patience W. Branch, who married the Reverend Daniel Southall.

The second wife of Colonel John Branch, Sr., was Elizabeth Norwood, daughter of John Norwood, and a sister of Judge William Norwood, of Hillsborough, North Carolina. By her he left the three following children:

I. William Joseph Branch, who married Rosa Williams Harriss.

II. Washington Lenoir Branch, who married Martha Anna Lewis.

III. Elizabeth Ann Branch, who married (first) Gideon Alston, and (second) the Reverend William Burge.

As already stated, one of the sons of Colonel John Branch was John Branch (known as John Branch, Jr., during his father's lifetime), and to the latter's career we shall now confine this sketch.

It was in the General Assembly of North Carolina, which convened at Raleigh on the 18th of November, 1811, that JOHN BRANCH, our present subject, made his first appearance in public life, having been elected State Senator from the county of Halifax. So acceptable were his services to the people of his county that he was repeatedly re-elected. Twice during the Second War with Great Britain, in 1813 and 1814, he was State Senator; and, as such, was a firm supporter of the measures of the National and State administrations in prosecuting that war. He was chairman of the Joint Legislative Committee which presented resolutions of censure (December 15, 1813) against the Honorable David Stone, in a tone so severe as to cause that gentleman to resign from the United States Senate, and make place for a more active supporter of the war measures demanded by the people of North Carolina. Mr. Branch had attained so high a reputation that when he was next sent to the State Senate, in 1815, that body unanimously elected him Speaker—the presiding officer of the Senate then being called Speaker, instead of having the more recent title of President. He was again State Senator and again unanimously elected Speaker, at the

two following sessions of 1816 and 1817. On the 3d of December, 1817, while serving his third term as Speaker of the State Senate, Mr. Branch was elected Governor of North Carolina by a joint ballot of the General Assembly—the office of Governor then being annually filled by the Legislature, and not by popular choice. On the day after his election as Governor, Mr. Branch sent in his resignation, both as Speaker and member of the Senate, whereupon that body unanimously passed the following resolution :

“Resolved, That the thanks of this House be presented to the late Speaker thereof, Colonel John Branch, for the able and impartial manner in which he has discharged the duties of the chair; and that a select committee of this House, composed of Mr. Murphey and Mr. Pickett, be appointed to wait on Colonel Branch and make known to him this Resolution.”

Mr. Branch was re-elected Governor on November 24, 1818; and elected for the third time on November 25, 1819, serving until December 7, 1820. In his official correspondence, and messages to the General Assembly, we see evidences of sagacity and foresight, while the humaneness of his disposition is shown by efforts to secure alterations of the over-severe penal laws of the time in which he lived.

Though Mr. Branch was elected Governor in 1817, he was not inaugurated until December 6th in that year, when the General Assembly had transacted most of its business, and hence it was not until the Legislature of 1818 convened that he transmitted his views on public matters, in the shape of an annual message, on November 18th in that year. Concerning education he then said :

“In a government like ours, where the sovereignty resides in the people, and where all power emanates from, and, at stated periods, returns to them for the purpose of being again delegated, it is of the last importance to the well being and to the existence of government that the public mind should be enlightened. Our sage and patriotic ancestors who achieved the liberties of our country, and to whom we are indebted for our present benign and happy form of government, duly impressed with the magnitude of the subject, and anxiously solicitous to impart stability to our institutions, and to transmit to

posterity the inestimable boon for which they fought and bled, have, as regards this subject, with more than parental caution, imposed the most solemn obligations on all of those who may be called to administer the government. Permit me, therefore, to refer you in a particular manner to this solemn injunction contained in the Constitution of the State of North Carolina, Article XLI, 'that a school or schools shall be established by the Legislature for the convenient instruction of youth, with such salaries to the masters, to be paid by the public, as may enable them to instruct at low prices; and all useful learning shall be duly encouraged and promoted in one or more Universities.' Let it be recollected that by this chart we are bound as the servants of the people, under the solemnities of an oath, to steer the vessel of state; and when we connect this imperious duty with the luminous and impressive appeals which have so often been made to the Legislature for the last year or two, I apprehend that nothing that I could add would impart additional force. It surely will not be denied that it is a subject, of all others, in a republican government, of the most vital importance: for it is in this way, and this alone, that our republican institutions can be perpetuated, or that radical changes can be effected in the morals and manners of the people."

In this message the Governor also commended the cause of internal improvements, dwelt upon the banking system of that day and other matters not of present interest, and earnestly recommended that punishments under the criminal law should be made less severe. The desirability of establishing a penitentiary was also discussed, imprisonment therein to supplant the many capital punishments then imposed by the statutes.

It is a fact not generally known that the Supreme Court of North Carolina was established in pursuance of a recommendation contained in the above-mentioned annual message, which Governor Branch sent to the Legislature on November 18, 1818. Before that time, the highest judicial tribunal in the State had been called the Supreme Court, but the Supreme Court of North Carolina, in its present form, was not organized until the year just mentioned. In his message, Governor Branch dwelt at some length on the inconveniences of the court procedure then existing, and closed by saying: "I will take the liberty of recommending that three additional

judges be appointed to preside in our Supreme Court, with sufficient salaries attached to the offices to command the first legal talents of the State." No time was lost by the Legislature in acting upon the Governor's recommendation, for Chapter I. at that session established the Supreme Court, and Chapter II. made some supplemental provisions defining its jurisdiction. The new Court first convened on January 1, 1819, John Louis Taylor presiding as Chief Justice, with Leonard Henderson and John Hall as Associates—worthy fore-runners of the long line of eminent jurists who have since given North Carolina a rank second to none in the judicial annals of America.

Governor Branch's interest in the cause of public education never flagged; and, when the next session of the State Legislature convened, he renewed his former recommendations, saying in his annual message, dated November 17, 1819:

"In the first place, as claiming a pre-eminence above all others, allow me to call your attention to the subject of the education of youth, the only durable basis of everything valuable in a government of the people, and to press on your attention the moral and political obligations which you are under, created and imposed by the solemn injunctions of the Constitution, to patronize and encourage a general diffusion of knowledge; for, when we advert to the languishing condition of some of our nurseries of science, and observe the apathy which prevails in regard to their advancement, it becomes a subject of no less astonishment than regret."

In the same message Governor Branch speaks in terms of emphatic condemnation of one of the most oppressive and unjust laws of that day, as follows:

"Imprisonment for debt must be considered as a kind of punishment which is inflicted at the mercy of the creditor, and must often be exercised upon objects where pity and not punishment is due. In truth it seems to be a remnant of that Gothic policy which prevailed during the ruder ages of society—a policy as barbarous as it is useless, and it is to me strange that it should so long have been suffered to disgrace the code of laws of a State which might otherwise boast of its freedom and humanity."

This message likewise refers to another law, then on the statute books, which provided that a person convicted of per-

jury should have his ears cropped off and nailed to the pillory, in these words:

“The cruel and sanguinary nature of the punishment inflicted on those guilty of perjury, and probably some other offences, without reference to the different degrees of criminality, are well worthy of legislative animadversion. The certainty of punishment, it is universally admitted, has more influence in preventing the commission of crimes than its severity. Hence it is desirable to apportion, as nearly as practicable, the punishment to the enormity of the offence.”

Love for the memory of Washington by the people of North Carolina had moved a former Legislature to provide for the making of a marble statue of the Father of his Country, by the great sculptor Canova, to be placed in the rotunda of the Capitol, and to give an order to the artist Thomas Sully for two full-length portraits of the same great patriot—one to be hung in each of the two Houses of the General Assembly. In a special message, dated November 23, 1819, Governor Branch announced that the statue would soon be ready for delivery, and suggested that the State content itself with one portrait of Washington. He said:

“However much we may be disposed to honor the virtue and perpetuate the fame of the immortal patriot, yet it appears to me that it will look a little like overdoing the matter to have a marble statue and two portraits of the same person in the same building.”

The advice of the Governor was followed by the Legislature, which procured one portrait instead of two. This portrait (copied by Sully from Stuart’s original) was saved from the burning Capitol in which Canova’s statue was destroyed, June 21, 1831, and still adorns the walls of the House of Representatives in Raleigh.

The wisdom and foresight of Governor Branch were strikingly displayed in his last annual message, November 22, 1820, when he referred to impostors in the medical profession, and urged a system of regulation for the government of physicians. This was his language:

“The science of medicine, so vitally interesting to our citizens and so well deserving of legislative attention, has as yet, with a few excep-

tions, passed unnoticed and unprotected. And it must be admitted, however unpleasant the admission, that there are but few States in the Union, where medicine is in a less reputable condition than in North Carolina. The question naturally occurs, why is this the case? The answer is obvious. Because, in almost every other part of the country, a medical education, regularly acquired, and formally completed at some public medical university, or satisfactory testimonials of professional ability from some respectable and legally constituted Board of Physicians, is essential to the attainment of public respect and public confidence.

“Hitherto the time of our annual sessions has been almost exclusively devoted to the preservation and security of property, while the lives, health, and happiness of a numerous and intelligent population have been left at the mercy of every pretender; and thousands and tens of thousands of our fellow-citizens, I might say, have fallen victims to the empirical efforts of a host of intruders.

“The youth of our State who have been reared and educated for the profession, with that native modesty which I trust will ever characterize them, advance with becoming diffidence in their avocations, while the more adventurous quack, presuming on the ignorance and credulity of the people, runs off with the spoil. This certainly in no one instance can last long; but, from the facility with which these persons change quarters, and from the eagerness with which afflicted humanity seizes the offered relief, the first fruits are but too often gathered by the rash though ignorant practitioner. Under these circumstances, what inducements have our young men to trudge up the rugged hill of science and spend their time and patrimony in laying the foundation for future usefulness? True, the intellectual triumph is exquisite; but, of itself, it is insufficient to sustain the diffident and desponding youth who finds himself pressed by so many difficulties, and finds, too, that his very sustenance is taken from him by the characters above alluded to.

“Again, it must be mortifying to see our young men constrained to abandon their native State in pursuit of medical science abroad, where, too often, in reaping the fruits of science, foreign principles and foreign habits are formed, not only opposed to the genius and spirit of our government, but measurably disqualifying them in other respects for useful life—thus exhausting, as it were, the last earnings of parental industry and frugality to obtain what might, with little effort, be as well obtained at home. Let me, however, observe, what may be deemed superfluous, that this Medical Board will not prejudice the pretensions of any practitioner of the present day, for its operations must necessarily be prospective.

“This subject presents so many interesting points, and in truth is so susceptible of illustration, that I must believe it is only necessary

to interest the mind of the intelligent statesmen to perceive its importance.

“I am aware that some diversity of sentiment may be expected as to the manner in which the Medical Board, above alluded to, should be established; but that it is not only practicable but highly expedient, none, I think, can rationally doubt when they advert to the uniform success which has attended the efforts of many of our sister States. Let me then entreat you, as the guardians of the people’s best interests, to give this subject, of all others the most interesting, a full, fair, and dispassionate consideration.”

Under the State Constitution then in force, Governor Branch was not eligible for more than three terms in succession, and in his last message he made (by way of conclusion) warm acknowledgments to the Legislature for past honors, in the following words:

“I shall now, gentlemen, close this desultory address; and, in doing so, permit me to tender you, and through you my fellow-citizens generally, the unfeigned homage of my respect and gratitude. If, in the discharge of the duties attached to the Executive Office, my conduct has been such as to give efficacy to a government of laws—to impart in the smallest degree vitality and energy to the benign and happy institutions under which we live, and finally to meet the approbation of my fellow-citizens, I can confidently say that my highest ambition will have been gratified, and that my fondest and most ardent anticipations have been realized.”

While Mr. Branch filled the Executive Chair in Raleigh, a little incident occurred (communicated to the writer by the Governor’s granddaughter, Mrs. Eppes) which makes an interesting story. On going to his tailor’s on one occasion, a small boy employed in the shop ran out and held his horse. After finishing his business, the Governor spoke kindly to the little fellow and tossed him half a dollar as he rode away. More than forty-five years thereafter, in June, 1865, when one of Governor Branch’s daughters returned to her home in Tennessee, which she had left a few years earlier to be near her husband, Major-General Daniel S. Donelson, of the Confederate Army, who had died in 1863, she found the place in a state of dilapidation and filth, with wood-work and furnishings wantonly broken and defaced, and the building occupied by a Federal officer, who refused to yield possession of the

place, though the war was over. Mrs. Donelson had made the trip from Florida in wagons, accompanied by some of her former slaves, and under the escort of her brother-in-law, Mr. Arvah Hopkins. Having occasion to continue his journey by rail to New York, Mr. Hopkins stopped in Washington and obtained an interview with President Johnson, to whom he explained the treatment Mrs. Donelson had received. After listening attentively, the President had an order issued and forwarded by telegraph to the occupant of the Donelson house to vacate it immediately, to have the premises cleaned, and workmen employed to repair such damage as the place had received. Then turning to Mr. Hopkins, he said: "I thank you, sir, for telling me of Mrs. Donelson's predicament. I wouldn't have missed this opportunity of doing a favor to a member of Governor Branch's family for anything in the world. He gave me the first fifty-cent piece I ever owned." Then the "Tailor-Boy President" related to Mr. Hopkins the small act of kindness shown by the Governor of a great State to little Andy Johnson, a penniless orphan in Raleigh nearly half a century before—an act which no doubt escaped Governor Branch's own memory less than an hour after it occurred.

Although Governor Branch's very soul abhorred the cruel laws of his day which inflicted punishments, severe out of all proportion, for many comparatively trivial crimes, and though he freely exercised the pardoning prerogative in such cases, no earthly power could move him to interfere where he deemed it proper and just for the law to take its course. During his term of office, a case arose in Raleigh where an intoxicated young white man had stabbed to the heart an inoffensive negro slave, and was sentenced to death therefor. A perfect avalanche of petitions and protests from practically the entire population of Raleigh was thereupon showered upon the Governor, asking a pardon. Among the many who sought clemency for the condemned were several State officers, one hundred and twenty-three ladies, and young Frederick Sterling Marshall, owner of the slave who had been killed. The prisoner's youth, his belated contrition and penitence, his al-

leged temporary "derangement of understanding," the insolence and insubordination which the petitioners declared would be encouraged among the negroes by putting the life of a freeman and of a slave upon the same footing, and many other considerations were urgently set forth without avail, and the prisoner died on the gallows on the 10th of November, 1820—notice being thereby served on the world that all human lives, those of the humble and dependent slaves as well as of their masters, were under the protection of the law in North Carolina.

Though always resentful of Northern interference, thoughtful men throughout the South were seeking a solution of the slavery problem for nearly three-quarters of a century before the outbreak of the War between the States. One of the experiments tried was the organization of the American Colonization Society in 1816, with Judge Bushrod Washington, of Virginia, as president. The object of this society was to take charge of such negroes as might from time to time be emancipated, and form a colony of them in Africa. Local branches of this association were formed in various cities throughout the South. On June 12, 1819, the Reverend William Meade, afterwards Bishop of Virginia (who proved his sincerity by freeing his own negroes), visited Raleigh and organized a local society. Governor Branch presided over the session which was then held, and became first president of the Raleigh organization, which later made considerable contributions in money for the furtherance of the plans set forth in the constitution of the society, \$1,277.50 being subscribed at the first meeting. The full list of officers was as follows: Governor Branch, President; and Colonel William Polk, Chief Justice John Louis Taylor, Judge Leonard Henderson, and Archibald Henderson, Vice-Presidents. The board of managers consisted of State Treasurer John Haywood, Judge Henry Potter, General Calvin Jones, General Beverly Daniel, the Reverend William McPheeters, Dr. Albridgton S. H. Burges, Dr. Jeremiah Battle, the Reverend John Evans,

Secretary of State William Hill, Thomas P. Devereux, Joseph Ross, and Moses Mordecai. The secretary was Joseph Gales, and Daniel Du Pre was treasurer. This list of officers (to which some additions were later made) is set forth in the *Raleigh Register*, of June 18, 1819.

In the General Assembly of North Carolina which convened on the 18th of November, 1822, Ex-Governor Branch was present as State Senator from Halifax County. On December 14th, after a prolonged contest, that Legislature elected him United States Senator, for a term beginning March 4, 1823, as successor to Montfort Stokes.

From the *Annals of Congress*, for December 2, 1823, we learn that, on that day "John Branch, appointed a Senator by the Legislature of the State of North Carolina, for the term of six years, commencing on the 4th day of March last, produced his credentials, which were read, and the oath prescribed by law was administered to him".

It is not the purpose of the present writer to attempt a detailed account of Mr. Branch's career in the United States Senate. The records show that he was one of the leading debaters in that august body—a body presided over by Calhoun, and made up of such men as Thomas H. Benton, Robert Y. Hayne, Martin Van Buren, John McPherson Berrien, Hugh Lawson White, William Henry Harrison, William R. King, Nathaniel Macon, and others of scarcely less note. While in the Senate, Mr. Branch advocated, as he had formerly done when Governor of North Carolina, the abolition of imprisonment for debt. Of the pension bill which provided for the relief of Revolutionary officers, to the exclusion of privates, he was a pronounced opponent, declaring that "he never would consent to place the officer, who had reaped the laurels of victory, on a different foundation from the private soldier who stood by the flag of his country, stimulated alone by patriotism." Internal improvements by the General Government he usually opposed, believing that this class of work should be done by the States wherein the improvements

were made, while harbors, rivers, canals and other waterways should receive the care of Congress. It is said that Mr. Branch's opposition to the Senate's confirmation of Henry Clay as Secretary of State, in 1825, first won for him the friendship of Andrew Jackson, between whom and the great Kentuckian little love existed.

When Senator Branch's first term was drawing to an end, the General Assembly of North Carolina, on November 24, 1828, unanimously re-elected him for six years more, to begin on March 4, 1829. He did not enter upon this second senatorial term, however, owing to a higher honor which fell to his lot a few days after his first term expired.

On the 9th day of March, 1829, President Jackson sent to the United States Senate the nomination of John Branch, of North Carolina, for the office of Secretary of the Navy. This nomination being duly confirmed, Secretary Branch went to North Carolina to arrange some private affairs and to tender his resignation, as United States Senator, to Governor Owen. The selection of Mr. Branch as a member of the President's Cabinet was naturally a source of great gratification to his friends in North Carolina and elsewhere; and, in the month following his appointment, the citizens of his native county of Halifax were preparing in his honor a great public entertainment, but this proffered courtesy he was forced regretfully to decline, owing to a promise to the President that he would return to his new post as head of the Navy Department with the least possible delay.

In the latter part of December, 1834, while a member of the Legislature of 1834-'35, to which he was elected after the expiration of his term in Congress which followed his Cabinet service, Mr. Branch made a speech in which he gave an interesting account of his official association with President Jackson. Concerning his appointment as Secretary of the Navy he said:

"Without solicitation on my part, he [President Jackson] desired me to become a member of his Cabinet, and take charge of the Navy

Department. I returned him my warmest acknowledgments for so distinguished an evidence of his confidence, but remarked that I doubted my ability to discharge the duties of that Department, either to my own satisfaction or that of my country, and that I must ask time to consult with my friends. To this he consented, and I promised to call and give him an answer next evening. The first person I asked counsel of was my friend and colleague, Governor Iredell, now perhaps within hearing of my voice, a gentleman whose high claims to confidence are universally acknowledged, and (to borrow a figure of the gentleman from Warren) whose inherent virtues and talents rendered him peculiarly fit to perform so delicate an office. He unhesitatingly said that, inasmuch as it was the first appointment of that grade ever tendered to a citizen of North Carolina, and as it was an honor intended to be conferred on the State through me, I was not at liberty to decline. The next friend with whom I consulted was the Senator from Burke [Samuel P. Carson], then a member of the House of Representatives of the United States—a friend indeed I may call him, a friend while in favor, but still more a friend when in adversity. His merits and just claims on the State I will speak of elsewhere. His counsels were substantially the same as those of Governor Iredell. I then sought interviews with many others; and, finding there was but one opinion among my friends as to the course proper for me to pursue, I in due time signified my acceptance of the trust.”

On December 1, 1829, Secretary Branch sent his first annual report to President Jackson. It told of the movements of various vessels in different parts of the world—the Mediterranean Sea, West Indian and South American waters, the Atlantic, Pacific, etc. It also gave a list of Navy Yards and Hospitals, and recommended in the strongest terms the establishment of a Naval School, where junior officers might be given a finished education, with especial attention paid to modern languages. Such instruction, said he, would be of great service during foreign cruises, while officers were in contact with the representatives of other nations. Many of the older officers, the Secretary intimated, were more of a hindrance than a help to the service, and should be relieved from active duty. He observed, however, that as these officers had formerly rendered honorable and useful service to the Government, ample provision should be made for their main-

tenance in retirement. He also recommended a revision of the laws respecting the Marine Corps. Piracy had not then been blotted out of existence, and he gave some account of operations against these depredators on American commerce. The pay of Naval officers, as compared with officers of relative rank in the Army, he said was unjustly inadequate, and should be increased.

In the message to Congress from President Jackson, he called attention to the annual report of Secretary Branch, as follows:

“The accompanying report of the Secretary of the Navy will make you acquainted with the condition and useful employment of that branch of our service during the present year. Constituting, as it does, the best standing security of this country against foreign aggression, it claims the especial attention of the Government. In this spirit the measures which, since the termination of the last war, have been in operation for its gradual enlargement, were adopted; and it should continue to be cherished as the offspring of our national experience.”

A few weeks before the entrance of Secretary Branch upon his duties as head of the Navy Department, Congress took its first action toward attempting to lessen the use of strong drink among junior officers of the Navy. On February 25, 1829,* the House of Representatives passed a Resolution instructing the Secretary of the Navy “to require three of the Medical Officers of the Navy, whom he shall designate, to report to him their opinions, separately, whether it is necessary or expedient that ‘distilled spirits’ should constitute a part of the rations allowed to Midshipmen.” In pursuance of these instructions, Secretary Branch designated Surgeons Thomas Harris, William P. C. Barton, and Lewis Heerman; and required them to give their opinions on this point. What these opinions were, the present writer has been unable to ascertain; but consideration of the same matter, with some

*Strange to say, the reported proceedings of Congress for February 25, 1829, fail to mention this matter, but manuscript letters in the Navy Department quote the language of the resolution of that date.

additions as to enlisted men, was again taken up by Congress one year (to the very day) after its first action. On February 25, 1830, the Honorable Lewis Condict, a member of Congress from New Jersey and a physician by profession, introduced the following resolutions in the House of Representatives:

"1. *Resolved*, That the Committee on Naval Affairs be instructed to inquire into the expediency of inducing the seamen and marines in the Navy of the United States voluntarily to discontinue the use of ardent spirits, or vinous or fermented liquors, by substituting for it double its value in other necessaries and comforts whilst in the service, or in money payable at the expiration of the service.

"2. *Resolved, also*, As a further inducement to sobriety and orderly deportment in the Navy, as well as with a view to preserve the lives and morals of the seamen and marines, that said committee be instructed to inquire into the expedience of allowing some additional bounty, in money or clothing, or both, to be paid to every seaman or marine, at the expiration of his service, who shall produce from his commanding officer a certificate of total abstinence from ardent spirits, and of orderly behaviour, during the term of his engagement.

"3. *Resolved, also*, That the said committee inquire and report whether or not the public service, as well as the health, morals, and honor of the Naval officers would be promoted by holding out to the Midshipmen and junior officers some further inducements and incentives to abstinence from all intoxicating liquors."

In introducing these resolutions, Congressman Condict said similar ones had already been before the Committee on Military Affairs, which recommended such action with respect to the Army; but had refused to make any recommendation concerning the Navy, as the latter branch of the service was considered outside of that committee's jurisdiction. What effect, if any, these resolutions had, the present writer is unable to say. It was not until some years later that the use of liquor on ship-board by enlisted men was peremptorily forbidden. In 1914, Secretary of the Navy Josephus Daniels made a similar prohibitory order applicable to commissioned officers also.

The second (and last) annual report of Secretary Branch bears date December 6, 1830, and is much similar in character to the first. It contains little matter which would be of

present interest. Not including many antiquated vessels which were laid up for repairs, or discarded, the ships then actively in commission consisted of five frigates, ten sloops of war and four schooners—a very diminutive armament when judged by present standards. Indeed, Secretary Branch was an avowed opponent of the policy of maintaining a large Navy in days of peace, which was an evidence of his wisdom when we consider the fact that he lived in the time of wooden vessels, when several hundred ship carpenters could build a fleet in a few weeks, as had been demonstrated on the Great Lakes during the War of 1812-'15.

Soon after Jackson's inauguration, a small coterie of his personal friends was gathered about him, consisting of General Duff Green, editor of the *United States Telegraph*, organ of the administration; Major William B. Lewis, of Tennessee, Second Auditor of the Treasury; Isaac Hill, editor of the *New Hampshire Patriot*; and Amos Kendall, Fourth Auditor of the Treasury, former editor of a Jackson paper in Kentucky. As these gentlemen were supposed to have more influence over the President's actions than did his official advisers, the opposition derisively styled them "the Kitchen Cabinet". Some time later, upon the rupture between Jackson and Calhoun, Green cast his fortunes with the latter. Thereupon, the elder Francis P. Blair came to Washington to establish a new administration organ, the *Globe*, and he was afterwards classed as a member of "the Kitchen Cabinet" as Green's successor. Of the newspaper war which followed, it has been truly said that "there were rich revelations made to the public."

When first inducted into office, President Jackson had made up his official family as follows: Martin Van Buren, of New York, Secretary of State; Samuel D. Ingham, of Pennsylvania, Secretary of the Treasury; John H. Eaton, of Tennessee, Secretary of War; John Branch, of North Carolina, Secretary of the Navy; John McPherson Berrien, of Georgia, Attorney General; and William T. Barry, of Ken-

tucky, Postmaster General. This first Cabinet was later dissolved, after a stormy controversy between the President and three of these gentlemen—not in consequence of any divergence of opinion or disagreements on the public policies of the day, but because Mrs. Branch, Mrs. Berrien, and Mrs. Ingham refused to pay social visits to Mrs. Eaton, or invite her to parties given in their homes. This Mrs. Eaton, wife of the Secretary of War, was the daughter of William O'Neal, a tavern-keeper in Washington, and grew to womanhood in her father's establishment. Peggy O'Neal, as she was familiarly known in her younger days, was vivacious, pretty, and apparently not possessed of as much prudence and decorum as might be desired, in consequence of which the Washington gossips (male and female) had whispered light tales concerning her for many years past. Her first husband, Purser Timberlake of the Navy, had committed suicide while stationed in the Mediterranean, leaving her with two small children. Among the boarders who spent much time at her father's inn were General Jackson and Major Eaton. After her first husband's death, Major Eaton (then a widower) became so much enamored of Mrs. Timberlake that he consulted his friend General Jackson about the propriety of seeking her in marriage. The gallant General strongly advised such a course. Major Eaton then mentioned—what was no news to Jackson—that many damaging reports had been spread broadcast concerning this lady, and that he himself (Major Eaton) had been credited with being over-intimate with her. "Well," said Jackson, "your marrying her will disprove these charges and restore Peg's good name." Accordingly Major Eaton and Mrs. Timberlake were married in the month of January, 1829. All went well for a while; but, a few months later, when a rumor began to gain credence that Major Eaton would be taken into the new President's Cabinet, the horror and consternation of the ladies of Washington may well be imagined. The matter grew even tenser after Eaton's appointment had been an-

nounced. With the exception of Secretary Van Buren—a widower with no daughters—all of the Cabinet officers were married men, whose wives were much given to hospitality, but their hospitality, even at public receptions, was never extended to Mrs. Eaton. When Jackson wrote to John C. Calhoun, remonstrating about Mrs. Calhoun's action (or rather inaction) in this matter, the Vice President very sensibly replied that it was a quarrel among ladies, and he would have nothing to do with it. To much the same effect was the observation of the Secretary of the Navy, when first approached on this subject; and later, when President Jackson attempted to dictate to him the social course his family should pursue, he found a man as headstrong and determined as himself in the person of the official whom one of Jackson's biographers has (not over-accurately) described as "the weak-willed Branch." And it may be said in passing while referring to Jackson's biographies, that there seems to be no truth whatever in the oft-repeated assertion in those works that Branch owed his appointment to Eaton's influence. Branch was tendered the appointment while Jackson was still debating in his mind whether to make Eaton or Hugh Lawson White the Secretary of War—a point which he found so difficult to decide that he finally left the matter to be settled by those gentlemen themselves, when White generously withdrew in Eaton's favor. Concerning Branch's own opinion of Eaton's appointment, he said in a statement issued in 1831: "Before the President had nominated Major Eaton for the War Department, and while the subject might be supposed to be under consideration, I took the liberty of stating to General Jackson candidly my reasons for believing the selection would be unpopular and unfortunate."

Even the Lady of the White House, Mrs. Andrew Jackson Donelson, wife of the President's nephew and private secretary, refused point-blank to call on Mrs. Eaton, whereupon she was promptly sent home to Tennessee, though later summoned back to Washington. Of his own family's con-

nection with this matter, we are fortunate in being able to give an account by Secretary Branch himself. He said:

“About the last of May, my family came on to mingle with a society to which they were strangers. They found the lady of the Secretary of War, a native of the city, excluded from this society, and did not deem it their duty or right to endeavor to control or counteract the decisions of the ladies of Washington; nor did they consider themselves at liberty to inquire whether these decisions were correct or otherwise. Engaged, as I was continually, with all the engrossing affairs of the Navy Department, I did not know at night whom my family had visited in the day, nor whom they had not; and thus the time passed without, I can confidently assert, the least interference on my part, with the matters that belonged exclusively to them.”

Though some bachelor members of the diplomatic corps (notably those from Great Britain and Russia) extended social courtesies to Mrs. Eaton in the shape of dinner parties, etc., the wives of other foreign ministers were no more considerate of her than were the ladies of the Cabinet. Indeed, the President so far lost his head in his desperate efforts to force Mrs. Eaton upon Washington Society that he seriously contemplated sending home the Minister from Holland because that diplomat's lady had withdrawn from a dinner at the Russian Embassy where Mrs. Eaton was a guest. Balked at every turn in his efforts to secure social honors, or at least social recognition, for Mrs. Eaton, the President now determined to dissolve his Cabinet, and find advisers more subservient to his wishes in social matters—for no record of political disagreement, at that time, between Jackson and his Cabinet, can be found.

The various letters, recorded interviews, newspaper communications, etc., brought forth by the affair of Mrs. Eaton, both before and after her husband's appointment, would fill a volume, and the present writer has no desire to weary the reader by attempting to set them forth. On April 8, 1831, Secretary of War Eaton sent in his resignation; and Secretary of State Van Buren did the same three days later. Secretary of the Navy Branch resigned on April 19th; and At-

torney General Berrien, then absent from Washington, sent the President his resignation on June 15th—Postmaster General Barry being the only member of the former Cabinet who remained in office. In fact the office of Postmaster General was not included in the Cabinet list before Jackson's time. The resignations of Van Buren and Eaton were received with many expressions of regret by the President, who later honored both of these gentlemen with other appointments. Indeed, it was Jackson's influence which afterwards elevated Van Buren to the Presidency as his successor. At the time of Branch's resignation, the President intimated his willingness to send him on a foreign mission. He also offered to appoint him Territorial Governor of Florida. These proffered honors were declined by Mr. Branch, though he became Governor of Florida some years later by appointment from President Tyler. Regarding his interview with Jackson just before he tendered the President his resignation, Secretary Branch has left the following account:

“He commenced by saying that he had desired my attendance to inform me of the resignations of Mr. Van Buren and Major Eaton, and then a solemn pause ensued. I could but smile, and remarked to him that he was acting in a character nature never intended him for; that he was no more a diplomatist than myself, and I wished him to tell me frankly what he meant. This unrestrained manner of mine relieved him; and, with great apparent kindness, he spoke out his purpose, and asked me if there was anything abroad I wanted, adding that the commission for Governor of Florida was on his table, and it would give him pleasure to bestow it on me. To this I replied that I had not supported him for the sake of office, and soon after retired.”

After the close of the interview just mentioned, Secretary Branch lost no time in forwarding to the President his resignation in the following communication:

Washington, April 19th, 1831.

Sir:

In the interview which I had the honor to hold with you this morning, I understood it to be your fixed purpose to reorganize your

Cabinet; and that, as to myself, it was your wish that I should retire from the administration of the Navy Department.

Under these circumstances, I take pleasure in tendering to you the commission, which, unsolicited on my part, you were pleased to confer on me.

I have the honor to be, with great respect,

Yours, &c.,

JOHN BRANCH.

To the President of the United States.

Upon receipt of this communication, President Jackson replied, upon the same day, in the following letter:

Washington, April 19th, 1831.

Sir:

Your letter of this date, by your son, is just received—accompanying it is your commission. The sending of the latter was not necessary; it is your own private property, and by no means to be considered part of the archives of the Government. Accordingly I return it.

There is one expression in your letter to which I take leave to except. I did not, as to *yourself*, express a wish that you should retire. The Secretaries of State and of War having tendered their resignations, I remarked to you that I felt it to be indispensable to reorganize my Cabinet proper; that it had come in harmoniously, and as a unit; and, as a part was about to leave me, which on tomorrow would be announced, a reorganization was necessary to guard against misrepresentation. These were my remarks, made to you in candor and sincerity. Your letter gives a different import to my words.

Your letter contains no remarks as to your performing the duties of the office until a successor can be selected. On this subject I should be glad to know your views.

I am very respectfully yours,

ANDREW JACKSON.

The Hon. John Branch,

Secretary of the Navy.

Immediately upon receipt of the letter just set forth, Secretary Branch sent the President the following reply:

Washington, April 19th, 1831.

Sir:

I have the honor to acknowledge the receipt of yours of this date, in answer to mine of the same.

In reply to your remark that there is one expression in my letter to which you must except, I would respectfully answer that I gave

what I understood to be the substance of your conversation. I did not pretend to quote your language. I regret that I misunderstood you in the slightest degree. I, however, stand corrected, and cheerfully accept the interpretation which you have given to your own expression.

I shall freely continue my best exertions to discharge the duties of the Department until you provide a successor.

I have the honor to be, with the greatest respect,

Your obedient servant,

JOHN BRANCH.

To the President of the United States.

The concluding letter of the official correspondence between President Jackson and Secretary Branch fully sets forth the former's reason for reorganizing the Cabinet, and bears testimony to the high opinion entertained by him of the manner in which the affairs of the Navy Department had been conducted by the retiring Secretary. It was as follows:

Washington, April 20th, 1831.

Sir:

Late last evening I had the honor to receive your letter of that date, tendering your resignation of the office of Secretary of the Navy.

When the resignations of the Secretary of State and Secretary of War were tendered, I considered fully the reasons offered, and all the circumstances connected with the subject. After mature deliberation, I concluded to accept those resignations. But when this conclusion was come to, it was accompanied with a conviction that I must entirely renew my Cabinet. Its members had been invited by me to the stations they occupied; it had come together in great harmony, and as a unit. Under the circumstances in which I found myself, I could not but perceive the propriety of selecting a Cabinet composed of entirely new materials, as being calculated, in this respect at least, to command public confidence and satisfy public opinion. Neither could I be insensible to the fact that to permit two only to retire would be to afford room for unjust misconception and malignant representations concerning the influence of their particular presence upon the conduct of public affairs. Justice to the individuals whose public spirit had impelled them to tender their resignations also required then, in my opinion, the decision which I have stated. However painful to my own feelings, it became necessary that I should frankly make known to you my view of the whole subject.

In accepting your resignation, it is with great pleasure that I bear testimony to the integrity and zeal with which you have managed the

concerns of the Navy. In your discharge of all the duties of your office over which I have any control, I have been fully satisfied; and in your retirement you carry with you my best wishes for your prosperity and happiness.

It is expected that you will continue to discharge the duties of your office until a successor is appointed.

I have the honor to be, with great respect,

Your most obedient servant,

John Branch,

ANDREW JACKSON.

Secretary of the Navy.

It has been said that the social controversy over Mrs. Eaton, which terminated in the dissolution of President Jackson's Cabinet, had an important bearing on United States history for many years thereafter, as it gained for Van Buren the Presidency, through the influence of Jackson, and widened between Jackson and Calhoun the breach which later resulted in the Nullification proceedings.

After winding up his affairs in Washington, Mr. Branch returned to his home in Enfield, North Carolina. Not long after this, he wrote a full account of his experiences in and retirement from the Cabinet to his friend, Edmund B. Freeman, then residing in the town of Halifax and later Clerk of the Supreme Court of North Carolina. This letter was first published in the *Roanoke Advocate*, of which Mr. Freeman was editor, afterwards being copied in the *Raleigh Register*, of September 1, 1831, in *Niles' Register*, of September 3, 1831, and other publications of that day. It is here given in full:

Enfield, August 22, 1831.

Dear Sir:

Of the causes which led to the dissolution of the late Cabinet, I have never entertained a doubt. I will briefly state the reasons I have for my opinion, and leave you to judge of them as well or as ill founded. Before the President had nominated Major Eaton for the War Department, and while the subject might be supposed to be under consideration, I took the liberty of stating to General Jackson candidly my reasons for believing the selection would be unpopular and unfortunate. I reminded the President that he knew I was the friend of Major Eaton, and *personally* preferred him to either of the others proposed for his Cabinet; and, of course, nothing I should say on the subject ought to be construed into an intention to injure

him (Major Eaton), but, on the contrary, to save him from infinite vexation and annoyance, which, it was too plain, were in store for him if he took a seat in the Cabinet under the circumstances in which he was placed. The President admitted that charges had been made against the character of Mrs. Eaton, but insisted on it they were slanders, and that he ought not to notice them. I did not perceive at the time that he was hurt by the frankness or nature of my communication, though I afterwards learned that he had become offended with, and had discarded from his acquaintance, several of his old and best friends who had used the like freedom of speech on this subject. My remonstrances, it is known, were without effect, and Major Eaton was soon after formally appointed Secretary of War. Before this was done, however, I made an appeal to Major Eaton himself, and without reserve disclosed my apprehensions to him, adding that I did not pretend to intimate that there was the least truth in these reports; but, if utterly false, they would still have an effect on the President's peace and quiet, as he must know what use the opposition would make of it; that I believed it was impossible he could be willing to subject General Jackson to such a state of things; that he could not have forgotten how much General Jackson had been distressed by the calumnies and ill reports which had been formerly circulated about Mrs. Jackson; that, since the death of that lady, those reports had subsided, and would soon be heard of no more; that General Jackson knew the same kind of reports and imputations had prevailed with respect to Mrs. Eaton; that if he (Major Eaton) entered into the Cabinet, the enemies of the President would not fail to make a handle of it, and thus revive, in the General's bosom, recollections which could not be but painful and distressing; and which could not fail to disturb the tranquility and usefulness of his administration. My remarks were received apparently with the same kindness and courtesy which characterized my manner, but they no doubt laid the foundation of that hostility which afterwards became active and unextinguishable. From the moment of Major Eaton's appointment, General Jackson began to use his utmost efforts to bring Mrs. Eaton into public favor and distinction. He frequently spoke of the neglect Mrs. Eaton received when she attempted to appear at public places. He did not fail to intimate that it would be a most acceptable service rendered him if the members of his Cabinet would aid in promoting this object. I felt greatly embarrassed by such appeals to myself. It was impossible for me to comply with his wishes on this point, but it was, nevertheless, painful for me to say so. In any other matter in which I could, with a proper respect for myself and the feelings of my family, have complied with an intimation of his desire, no one would have done so more cheerfully than myself. By way of diverting his mind, I several times spoke of the difficulty he would experience in attempting to regulate the intercourse of the ladies;

that they were, in matters of that kind, uncontrollable and omnipotent; that he would find less difficulty in fighting over again the Battle of New Orleans. Soon after it was ascertained that Mrs. Eaton could not be received into the society of the families of the members of the Cabinet, Major Eaton's conduct to me discovered an evident change in his friendly feelings, and became cold, formal, and repulsive. I repeatedly threw myself into his company, and endeavored to assure him that I still had the most sincere desire to be on friendly terms with him, and wished for opportunities to convince him of the sincerity of my professions. In this course there was no guile—no view but that which my words fairly imported. I most sincerely regretted the state of public feeling towards Mrs. Eaton, but it was not within my power to control or soften it. It was a sentiment resting in the breast of the female community of Washington City and the Nation, which was not to be suppressed or obliterated. After this, Major Eaton's enmity to myself became every day more and more apparent. I could hear frequently of declarations to this effect, and of his determination to be revenged. It is true these reports came to me circuitously and indirectly, but I could not, from circumstances, doubt their truth.

At length came the mission by Colonel Johnson, the substance of which has already been given to the public by Messrs. Ingham and Berrien. I will only add to their statements that I distinctly understood Colonel Johnson to say that he came to us from the President of the United States, authorized by him to hold the interview; and, unless our difficulties in reference to Mrs. Eaton could be adjusted, that Mr. Ingham, Judge Berrien, and myself must expect to retire. When he closed his remarks, I well recollect rising from my seat, and, with an earnestness of manner which the extraordinary character of the communication was so well calculated to produce, observed, among other things, that no man had a right to dictate to me and my family, in their domestic relations, and that I would submit to no control of the kind. The Colonel undertook to reason the matter with us by observing that, although it might be impracticable to establish *intimate* and *social* relations between our families and Mrs. Eaton, he could see no reason why she should not be invited to our *large parties*, to which everybody was usually invited, Tom, Dick, Harry, &c. With this concession, he said, the President would be satisfied. We protested against the interference of the President in any manner or form whatever, as it was a matter which did not belong to our official connection with him, soon after which Colonel Johnson expressed his deep regret at the failure of his mission, and we separated.

I waited until Friday, a day having intervened, in expectation of hearing from the President; but, receiving no message, I walked over, in hopes that an opportunity would offer to put an end to my

unpleasant state of feeling. I found the President alone. He received me with his wonted courtesy, though evidently but ill at ease. In a few minutes the absorbing subject was introduced. Among other things, he spoke in strong language of the purity of Mrs. Eaton's character and the baseness of her slanderers, and presently mentioned a rumor, which he said had been in circulation, of a combination to exclude her from society. Several parties, he said, had been recently given, among others three by Mr. Ingham, Judge Berrien, and myself, to which she had not been invited; and from this it was strongly inferred that we had combined to keep her out of society. I told him that, so far as I was concerned, I believed my family were doing no more than the members of Congress, the citizens of Washington, and visitors to the seat of Government, had a right to expect from me as a member of his Cabinet. It was certainly in accordance with universal custom; and that, as to a combination, I knew of none; that I could never acknowledge the right of any one to interfere in matters affecting the private and social arrangements of my family; and that, before I would be dictated to, or controlled in such matters, *I would abandon his Cabinet, and was ready to do so whenever he desired it*, and added several other strong remarks of a similar character. He assured me, in reply, *that he did not desire it; that he was entirely satisfied with the manner in which I had discharged my official duty, and that he did not claim the right to dictate to us in our social relations*, but that he felt himself bound to protect the family of Major Eaton, as he would mine under similar circumstances. I then informed him that Colonel Johnson had formally announced to Mr. Ingham, Judge Berrien, and myself, that it was his intention to remove us from office for the cause mentioned, and I had learned from Mr. I. the evening before, who derived his information from the Colonel, that he had gone so far as to make temporary arrangements for the Departments, viz., Mr. Dickins for the Treasury, Mr. Kendall for the Navy, and some one else for Attorney General. This the President denied, and said he would send for Colonel Johnson, and for that purpose called for a servant. When the servant came, I observed it was unnecessary to send for the Colonel—his word was sufficient. "Well," said he, "if you are satisfied." I told him I was. We continued our conversation for some time. I attempted, on that occasion, as I had done several times before, to convince him of the impropriety of his interfering at all in a question of such a delicate character, but his feelings were evidently too much enlisted to weigh any reasons which might be offered.

I have already informed the public that no paper was presented to me, or read to me, or alluded to, having reference to the future conduct of the members of the Cabinet. On this head I cannot be mistaken. I may add that the President constantly insisted on the necessity of harmony among the members of the Cabinet. Here I cannot

refrain from a remark upon this injunction of the President, that Major Eaton was the only dissatisfied member of the Cabinet, the only one who carried complaints to the President of the conduct of others, the only one who employed his efforts to bring us to discredit with the public or the President. Among the others the utmost civility and sociability prevailed. No one annoyed him (Major Eaton) or made any effort to embarrass the operations of his Department or in any manner acted towards him as inimical or deficient in respect; and yet we are to be punished for the discordances of the Cabinet. Can any decision be more arbitrary and unjust?

A few days after this interview with the President, Colonel Johnson came into the Navy Department, and as he entered I rose to receive him. With his wonted cordiality of manner he expressed his satisfaction at the pacific aspect of our relations. I observed to him, with a smile, that the President denied having authorized him to make such a communication as he had made. He good-humoredly replied, "Let it pass; I presented it to you in the most favorable light," and, as he was hurried, here the conversation ended.

About the same time I had an interview with Major Eaton, in the presence of Judge Berrien and Major Barry. This was brought about by the President. Major Eaton, it seems, had complained to him, either directly or indirectly, that at a party given by my family the last of September or the first of October, 1829,* to the family of a most estimable friend and relation of mine, from Nashville, Tennessee, who was on a visit to Washington City, the Rev. J. N. Campbell, then of that place, now of Albany, N. Y., was among the invited guests. The circumstances were these: Mr. Campbell, who had resided in the city for some years previous to General Jackson's inauguration, was the pastor of a church, and such was his reputation that the President and three members of his Cabinet, viz., Mr. Ingham, Judge Berrien, and myself, took pews and became regular attendants at his church. In the course of his ministry he formed an acquaintance with my family, and occasionally visited them. He happened there while my friend Hill and his family were with us, contracted an acquaintance with them; and, when the party alluded to was given, my daughters invited him. He attended, and took the liberty of carrying with him his friend Dr. Ely, of Philadelphia, who had just arrived. I knew no more of his being invited than of any other person who happened to be present. He was, however, not the less welcome on that account, nor was his friend Dr. Ely. Neither of these gentlemen require a recommendation where they reside. Mr. Campbell is known to be a learned, pious, and most eloquent divine. Some short time after the party, I heard, very much to my surprise, that Major Eaton and some of his partisans were enraged with me,

*Mr. Branch later corrected this statement, saying September 8, 1829, was the exact date. M. DeL. H.

and threatened my destruction, because Mr. Campbell and Dr. Ely were at my house as above stated. I could scarcely credit the report, until it was mentioned to me by the President, when I emphatically asked him who questioned my right to invite whom I pleased to my house? He testily observed, No person; but, as there was some misunderstanding between Major Eaton, Mrs. E., and Mr. Campbell, that he (Major E.) thought it evinced hostility to him. At the interview above alluded to, between Major Eaton, Judge Berrien, Major Barry, and myself, Major Eaton mentioned the circumstances of Mr. Campbell and Dr. Ely being at my house on the occasion referred to. I asked Major Eaton, in the most frank and friendly manner, if this was his only complaint, and if he would be satisfied, provided I convinced him he was in error, assuring him at the same time that he had no right to consider me as being under the influence of unfriendly feelings towards him; that, on the contrary, he ought to know my personal attachment for him, before the Cabinet was formed; and further, if he would obtain the consent of his brother-in-law, Major Lewis, to read a confidential correspondence which passed between Major L. and myself, in the Winter of 1827-'28, on this *disturbing subject*, he would then be convinced of the disinterestedness and correctness of my course, and of its entire conformity to that friendship and good will which had so long subsisted between us. I might have gone further and said that Major Lewis, in the Winter of 1827-'28, when there could be no unworthy motive to mislead either of us, considered Mrs. Eaton an unsafe associate for his daughter, although he was now endeavoring to induce General Jackson to drive me out of the Cabinet because I would not compel my daughters to associate with her. Major Eaton would not say whether he would be satisfied or not, and the explanation was withheld. But as we were about to separate, he offered me his hand in a more cordial manner than he had done for some months previous. I have no doubt that Major Eaton, in tendering his resignation, stipulated for the dismissal of the three offensive members of the Cabinet. Mr. Van Buren, also, I have reasons to believe, urged the adoption of this measure. This gentleman had discovered that the three members of the Cabinet (afterwards ejected) disdained to become tools to subserve his ambitious aspirations, and he determined to leave them as little power to defeat his machinations as possible. It is said to be a part of his character to tolerate politically no one who will not enter heart and soul into measures for promoting his own aggrandisement. He had become latterly the almost sole confidant and adviser of the President. How he obtained this influence might be a subject of curious and entertaining inquiry. But I shall not pursue it. I may add, however, that amongst the means employed, were the most devoted and assiduous attentions to Mrs. Eaton, and unceasing efforts to bring her into notice, especially with the families of the foreign Ministers.

Finally, when the President found that his efforts to introduce Mrs. Eaton into society proved abortive, he became every day less communicative, and more and more formal in his hospitalities until there could be no doubt that, as to myself, an unfriendly influence had obtained an ascendancy in his private councils, and the result shows that he had determined to sacrifice me to gratify the feelings of those whom I had offended as stated above.

I may at some future time add to these views. At present I take my leave, with assurances of great respect and esteem.

Yours, &c.,

To Edmund B. Freeman, Esq.,

JOHN BRANCH.

Halifax Town.

P. S.—I have not considered it necessary to notice a charge made in *The Globe*, against Judge Berrien, of suppressing a material part of a letter which I wrote to him, and my substituting another in its stead. If any person has been misled by this bold accusation of the editor of *The Globe*, and is desirous of obtaining correct information, he has my permission to read the whole letter, although it was not intended to be made public.

For some years the bitter feelings, caused by the disruption of the Cabinet, survived, and came near causing a duel between Ex-Secretary Branch and Senator Forsyth, of Georgia, in the year following, while Mr. Branch was serving as a member of Congress, to which office he had been elected after his resignation from the Cabinet. The newspapers published what purported to be a speech made by Senator Forsyth, in an executive session of the Senate, on the nomination of Martin Van Buren as Envoy Extraordinary and Minister Plenipotentiary to the Court of St. James, in which Forsyth was quoted as referring to “a late Secretary” as a “volunteer repeater of confidential conversations with the Chief Magistrate.” Upon having this called to his attention, Mr. Branch addressed the following communication to Senator Forsyth:

Washington City, February 5th, 1832.

Sir:

I have read the printed report of your speech, prepared by you for the press, purporting to be the remarks which you made in the Senate, in secret session, on the nomination of Martin Van Buren as Envoy Extraordinary and Minister Plenipotentiary to the Court of St. James.

The notice which you take of a conversation referred to in the debate by Mr. Poindexter, Senator from Mississippi, requires that I should ask of you to state to me, explicitly, whether you did or did not know, or had reason to believe at the time you wrote out your speech for publication, that I was the "somebody, one of the late Secretaries" to whom you refer as the volunteer repeater of confidential conversations with the Chief Magistrate?

Your reply to this communication will regulate my future action on this subject.

I am respectfully yours, &c.,

JOHN BRANCH.

Hon. John Forsyth.

This note was conveyed to Senator Forsyth by the Honorable Samuel P. Carson, a Representative in Congress from North Carolina, who also had a verbal discussion of the subject with the Georgia Senator, who did not consider it consistent with self-respect to make any explanation while the implied threat, with which Mr. Branch's note concluded, was allowed to stand. By the hands of Congressman William S. Archer, of Virginia, he sent to Colonel Carson the following communication:

Washington, February 5th, 1832.

Dear Sir:

Although perfectly satisfied with your verbal declaration, on reflection, since we separated this morning, I think it indispensable that the concluding paragraph in the enclosed letter should be omitted, or that your remarks to me on the subject of it should be in writing before an answer to it is transmitted to you.

I return it to you to adopt either course that may be most agreeable to you.

I am, dear sir, very sincerely,

JOHN FORSYTH.

Hon. Mr. Carson.

After consultation with Colonel Carson, Mr. Branch consented to withdraw the objectionable paragraph, it being considered immaterial, and Carson replied to Forsyth as follows:

House of Representatives, February 6th, 1832.

Dear Sir:

If the simple interrogatory contained in the letter of Governor Branch, would be more acceptable to you, without the paragraph

with which it concludes, I am authorized, as his friend, to state to you that that paragraph may be considered as stricken from his note, not deeming it essential to the substance of his inquiry.

Very respectfully,

Hon. John Forsyth.

SAM'L P. CARSON.

P. S.—Your note was not handed to me till this day, since the meeting of the House.

Feeling now free to answer Mr. Branch's letter, Senator Forsyth sent this reply to the inquiry therein contained:

Washington, February 6th, 1832.

Sir:

I have received your note by Colonel Carson.

The remarks of mine, to which you point my attention, were made in answer to Mr. Poindexter, and intended to apply to the person referred to by him, without *knowledge* of that person, on my part, then, or at the time my remarks were prepared for the press.

I am very respectfully yours, &c.,

JOHN FORSYTH.

Hon. Mr. Branch.

On the day after Senator Forsyth's reply was written, another note from Mr. Branch was conveyed to him in these words:

Washington, February 7th, 1832.

Sir:

In your answer to my note by Colonel Carson, you state that you did not know that I was the person referred to by Governor Poindexter as having held a conversation with the President. It being now made known to you that I was the person, I wish to inquire whether you feel yourself at liberty to disavow the application of those remarks to me?

I am respectfully, &c.,

JOHN BRANCH.

Hon. John Forsyth.

The matter was concluded to the satisfaction of all parties when, on the same day, Senator Forsyth sent the following disclaimer:

Washington, February 7th, 1832.

Sir:

Your note of this morning informs me that you were the person referred to by Mr. Poindexter in the observations alluded to in your

former notes, and inquires whether I feel at liberty to disclaim the application to you of my remarks in reply.

Having submitted the subject to some of my friends, who unite in thinking that the inference from the observations of Mr. Poindexter, under which my remarks were made, that the conversation referred to had been confidential, was not warranted, and satisfied that the view of the subject is correct, I have no hesitation in disclaiming the application to you of the charge, imported by these remarks, of having repeated a *confidential* conversation.

I am respectfully, &c.,

JOHN FORSYTH.

Hon. John Branch,
House of Representatives.

The above correspondence, made public by Messrs. Carson and Archer, first appeared in *The United States Telegraph*. Later it was copied in *Niles' Weekly Register*, of February 11, 1832.

It was doubtless a source of satisfaction to the friends of both parties that the controversy between Mr. Branch and Senator Forsyth was adjusted in a manner honorable to both gentlemen, and probably to none so much as to Colonel Carson, who, less than four years before, in consequence of some aspersions cast on the honor of his aged father, had challenged and killed Ex-Congressman Robert Brank Vance—a circumstance which marred his happiness throughout the remainder of his life.

While speaking of the practice of duelling, it may be mentioned that Mr. Branch, during his term as Senator, was one of the party of gentlemen who witnessed the famous duel between Henry Clay and John Randolph in 1826.

Upon the retirement of Secretary Branch from the Cabinet of President Jackson, he returned to North Carolina, and was received with every mark of consideration and honor by the people of his native State. Under date of August 18, 1831, the citizens of Bertie County, through a committee of their number, sent him an invitation to become the guest of honor at a banquet which they wished to give at the town of Windsor as a testimonial to his worth, or (to quote the language of the

invitation) for the "purpose of expressing their high regard for his private virtues, as well as the high opinion which they entertained of his firm and undeviating course, prominently displayed in many important services rendered his State, and more especially by his late demonstration of attachment to those principles which had always governed him." On August 20th, Mr. Branch replied that, under the most auspicious circumstances of his life, such marked kindness could not fail to be highly acceptable; but the fact of his having been recently expelled from the Cabinet of the President by the ascendancy of certain "malign influences" and of still being pursued in his retirement with a fiendlike vengeance, bent on the destruction of his good name, nothing could be more grateful to his feelings than the generous confidence and support of those who had known him from his earliest entrance into public life. Sickness in his family, he said, now required his undivided attention and would soon render necessary a trip to another climate. Hence he would have to forego the high gratification he should otherwise experience in making his acknowledgments to friends gathered around the festive board. A few months after this, Mr. Branch went on a visit to Tennessee. On October 4th, he delayed his trip in Raleigh long enough to call attention, through the *Raleigh Register* of October 6th, to the fact that in a lengthy statement recently issued by Ex-Secretary Eaton, the latter, in publishing a letter written by Mr. Branch to Jackson, had altered the date and thereby made it appear that Branch was so lacking in self-respect as to continue expressing feelings of ardent friendship for the President two days after that official had shown him marked discourtesy in an interview on the all-disturbing topic of Mrs. Eaton. As a matter of fact, the letter was written two days before the interview took place, and at a time when Mr. Branch had every reason to count the President among his best friends.

While on his way to Tennessee, Mr. Branch passed through Asheville (where the Superior Court was in session), and his admirers in that vicinity tendered him a public entertainment, but circumstances rendered it impossible for him to accept the proffered courtesy.

In August, 1831, a signal honor was paid Mr. Branch when the Honorable Jesse A. Bynum and other candidates for Congress in the Halifax District voluntarily withdrew from the race and caused his unanimous election to the National House of Representatives. Mr. Branch entered upon his new duties at the first session of the Twenty-second Congress, which assembled on the 5th of the following December. Having long been a conspicuous figure in National politics, he at once took high rank in his new station. During the course of his service he was a debater on many bills and resolutions which came before that body, including banking laws, Indian affairs, the tariff, naval affairs, &c., all of which were important in their day but which would not be of interest if set forth at length in this sketch.

When men first began to make use of steam power, numerous conjectures were made as to what purpose it would serve; and, in 1832, a bill was introduced in Congress to authorize the Navy Department to expend \$111,704 in the fitting out of a steam frigate and the construction of two "steam batteries." On June 21st, in the year just mentioned, Congressman Branch called up this bill and advocated its passage. He said that Secretary of the Navy Woodbury wished the experiment made, to ascertain whether steam power might not successfully be introduced as a means of naval defense. With keen foresight he further declared: "It is admitted on all hands that, sooner or later, this newly discovered power will be introduced, if not in offensive, certainly in defensive warfare, and I think the contemplated experiment worth making". These so-called "steam batteries" were small vessels, not much more than barges, propelled by steam and carrying small batteries, to be used chiefly for coast defense. Seven

years later, in 1838, Secretary of the Navy Dickerson also recommended the construction and equipment of this type of defensive craft.

At the expiration of his term in the National House of Representatives, Mr. Branch declined to become a candidate for re-election. This left the field open to the Honorable Jesse A. Bynum and Colonel Andrew Joyner; and, in the contest which followed, Mr. Bynum was victorious.

In the year following his retirement from Congress, Mr. Branch made his last appearance as a member of the Legislature of North Carolina, taking his seat in the State Senate which convened in the month of November, 1834, and continued its sittings into the early part of 1835. The General Assembly of the year just mentioned had many distinguished members, who were chiefly interested in the question of calling a State Constitutional Convention in 1835, which was accordingly done. In this Legislature was also a bitter fight over the proposition to instruct United States Senator Willie P. Mangum to vote for expunging the resolution of censure against President Jackson for removing from office the Secretary of the Treasury, William J. Duane, and withdrawing Government deposits from the banks. There was much discussion among the North Carolina legislators as to the proposed instructions to expunge, and Mr. Branch (an ardent advocate of States' Rights, now allied with the Calhoun faction) made a notable speech opposing the proposed instructions to Senator Mangum. In this speech he gave a full narrative of his past connection with Jackson, and his remarks attracted wide attention. The *Raleigh Star and North Carolina Gazette*, of December 25, 1834, said Mr. Branch's speech was the "topic of conversation in every circle", and the same paper of February 12, 1835, gave the speech in full, remarking editorially: "It is an able production, and, as it comes from one whose sound republicanism, unimpeachable veracity, and sterling integrity, his bitterest political enemies would not dare to question, the extraordinary

facts which he narrates cannot fail to produce a powerful effect upon the public mind." Notwithstanding the opposition of the faction led by Branch, the Jacksonians were victorious, triumphantly carrying the resolution of instruction, which Senator Mangum refused to obey after it was passed.

On the 4th day of June, 1835, the Constitutional Convention of North Carolina assembled in Raleigh. In this body were many of the State's ablest and most distinguished citizens. John Branch was the delegate from Halifax County. On the opening day of the session he placed in nomination for President of that body the venerable Nathaniel Macon, his old senatorial colleague, who was unanimously elected. Mr. Branch took a prominent part in the deliberations and debates of the Convention. Annual sessions of the General Assembly he strongly favored. Of his position on this point the Convention Journal says: "He believed that annual sessions of the Legislature were well calculated to keep in check Federal usurpations. The powers of the General Government are constantly increasing and American liberty depends on the preservation of State Rights and State Powers." The speaker declared that he was no disorganizer, but favored keeping a constant watch on the Federal power. He advocated the abolition of borough representation in the Legislature though in his own county was one of the "borough towns." On the subject of the Thirty-second Section of the Constitution, aimed at Roman Catholics and providing a religious test for office-holders, he said he had risen from an attack of illness to vote for its repeal. He realized, as all men did, that this section had always been inoperative (Burke, Gaston, and possibly other Roman Catholics having held office without molestation on account of their religious views), but he declared that the section ought to be expunged from the Constitution as unworthy to remain in it. When, however, a Christian test was proposed to be substituted in its place, Mr. Branch declared that he could not conscientiously vote for the substitute. "Striking out the word

Protestant and inserting the word *Christian* would not cure the evil," said he, and asked: "Why are the Jews to be excluded from office? They were the favored people of the Almighty. Our Savior and His disciples were Jews; and are there not men among the Jews as talented, as virtuous, as well qualified to fill any office in our Government, as any other citizen in our community? A Jew may be appointed to any office under the General Government. He may be raised to the Presidency of the United States. And why shall we refuse to admit him to any office under our Government?" The speaker added: "I am opposed to all religious tests for office, and shall therefore vote against this amendment." In this Convention, Mr. Branch opposed the proposition to deprive free negroes of the right to vote, provided they possessed property, saying "he was willing to keep the door open to the most intelligent free men of color, but was unwilling to part with the freehold qualification." His membership in this Constitutional Convention was the last public office ever held by Mr. Branch in North Carolina, though he was once more a candidate before the people of the State.

The amended State Constitution, which was duly ratified by the people in a general election, provided that the office of Governor should be filled by popular vote, and not by the Legislature as theretofore; and Edward B. Dudley, of Wilmington, was elected by the Whigs over the Democratic nominee, Ex-Governor Richard Dobbs Spaight, (the younger) in 1836. In 1838, Governor Dudley, who had ably administered the affairs of his office, was a candidate for re-election, and Mr. Branch (still legally a citizen of the State though absent much of the time in Florida) was nominated by the Democrats to oppose him; but the Whigs were again victorious. After this defeat, Mr. Branch was never again a candidate for public office in North Carolina, though a post of high honor in Florida was soon to be conferred on him—a post which had been tendered him before, in 1831, but which was declined at that time.

In 1836, when Martin Van Buren was the nominee of the Democratic party for President, being given this honor chiefly through Jackson's influence, John Branch voted against that candidate; but, by 1840, when Van Buren was again the choice of his party for President, Mr. Branch's resentment against his old associate in the Cabinet had so far cooled down that he returned to the Democratic ranks and gave him his unqualified support.

The present sketch has heretofore dealt with the public career of Governor Branch in North Carolina and at the National Capital, and it may be well now to say something of his personal history and domestic life before we treat of his later services as Governor of Florida. In telling of these private aspects of his life, the writer hereof wishes to make acknowledgments, for valuable assistance, to the Governor's granddaughter, Mrs. Nicholas Ware Eppes (née Bradford), of Tallahassee, Florida, a lady of rare intelligence, who in childhood and youth was thrown into close association with her grandfather, and probably has a better first-hand knowledge of his life and character than any other person now living.

Though born in the town of Halifax, Governor Branch's early childhood was spent at Elk Marsh, his father's country-seat near Enfield, in Halifax County. He is said to have been a slender, delicate little lad, very studious, and given to thinking deeply on any subject that interested him. After a preparatory education in a neighboring "old field school," he entered the University of North Carolina, at Chapel Hill, a few years after the establishment of that renowned institution, and graduated with the degree of Bachelor of Arts in 1801. His loyalty to his Alma Mater was lifelong. He was *ex officio* Chairman of the Board of Trustees of the University when Governor, from 1817 to 1820, and remained a member of that Board until absence from North Carolina in 1844 made him ineligible for further service. Time and again he attended the commencement exercises, and was

probably the oldest living graduate for some years prior to his death, which occurred sixty-two years after the completion of his university course.

After his graduation from the University of North Carolina, young Branch returned home, and soon went to the neighboring county of Franklin, where he became a student of law under Judge John Haywood, a native of Halifax County, who then held a seat on the Superior Court Bench of North Carolina and was afterwards a Judge of the Supreme Court of Tennessee. Law, however, seems not to have been to the liking of Mr. Branch, and he soon entered the more active field of politics, also taking a deep interest in the management of his extensive landed estates. His first wife (the mother of all his children), to whom he was married on April 6, 1803, was Elizabeth Foort, daughter of John Foort, Jr., a gentleman of Scottish descent, residing in Halifax, whose wife, Margaret Randolph, was a daughter of Dr. Richard Randolph, of Virginia. At the time of his marriage Mr. Branch was only twenty years old, and his wife sixteen, she having been born on January 1, 1787. The youthful pair took up their abode on the "Cellar Field" plantation near Enfield. In worldly possessions they were not lacking, Mr. Branch having inherited a good estate from his mother and later from his brother James, and Mrs. Branch being a woman of wealth in her own right—her father having died before her marriage. Mrs. Eppes, whom we have already mentioned, says of her grandparents: "The young couple were almost children, yet they were happy children and devoted lovers throughout more than forty years of their married life. Never was there a more hospitable home, and besides the nine sons and daughters who came to them, two orphan nieces of Mrs. Branch's and five of Joseph Branch's children, as well as several cousins, found a home and a father's and mother's loving care beneath their roof." One of the orphan children of Joseph Branch, here alluded to, was Lawrence O'Bryan Branch, in after life distinguished as

railroad president, Congressman, and Confederate General, who was slain in 1862 at the battle known to the Federals as Antietam and to the Confederates as Sharpsburg. Besides three daughters, General Branch left an only son, William Augustus Blount Branch, who saw service in the Confederate Army before reaching manhood, as a courier on the staff of Major-General Robert F. Hoke, and afterwards was a member of the fifty-second and fifty-third Congresses, 1891-'95.

Mrs. Elizabeth Branch was indeed a woman qualified by nature, training, disposition, and intellectual endowments, to share the fortunes of her distinguished husband in the various high stations to which he was called. In the capitals of both North Carolina and Florida, her gracious hospitality, when wife of the Chief Executive, won for her the esteem and admiration of the refined circles in which she moved, and, while sojourning among the notables of Washington, she was fully equal to the task of upholding the social responsibilities resting upon the lady of a cabinet official or national legislator. Indeed, if the traditions of old Washington be true, the Branch home surpassed all others in the fashionable yet wholesome character of its entertainments. So elaborate and largely attended, too, were these social affairs, that a lady of that day, in a letter, spoke of one of them as "Governor Branch's crush-party."

As already stated, Mrs. Elizabeth Branch, the first wife of Governor Branch, was the mother of all of his children. They were nine in number, as follows:

I. Martha Lewis Henry Branch, born September 29, 1806, who married Dr. Edward Bradford, on November 10, 1825, and left descendants.

II. Rebecca Bradford Branch, born August 25, 1808, who married Robert White Williams* on April 19, 1831, and left descendants.

*After the death of his first wife, Rebecca Bradford Branch, Mr. Williams married her first cousin, Susan Simpson Branch, sister of General L. O'B. Branch.

III. Margaret Branch, born August 4, 1810, who was married on October 18, 1830, to Daniel S. Donelson (a nephew of Mrs. Andrew Jackson), who distinguished himself in the War with Mexico and the War between the States, holding the rank of Major-General in the Confederate Army when he died in 1863, leaving descendants.

IV. James Branch, born November 17, 1812, who married Ann Eliza Belton on February 20, 1839, and left an only child, who died in infancy.

V. Sarah Harris Branch, born on February 14, 1814, who married Dr. James Hunter on July 15, 1833, and left descendants.

VI. Mary Eliza Branch, born on July 21, 1815, who was first married to General Leigh Read on May 17, 1838, and after his death to General William Bailey, leaving by her first marriage an only daughter, who died young, and by her second marriage, an only son.

VII. John Richard Branch, born September 28, 1819, who married Josephine Woods in November, 1841, and left descendants.

VIII. William Henry Branch, born October 9, 1823, who married Mary Eliza Horton on October 11, 1848, and left descendants.

IX. Susan Branch, born January 8, 1826, who married Arvah Hopkins on December 13, 1849, and left descendants.

Through the nine children just enumerated, Governor Branch has a large number of descendants now living. Their homes for the most part are in Florida, though some are residents of Halifax County, North Carolina, as well as of other localities. To Governor Branch's second marriage, which occurred after he had passed his three-score years and ten, reference is made elsewhere in this sketch.

Governor Branch, whose business (both public and private) demanded his presence for prolonged periods of time in various localities, necessarily had many different domi-

ciles during the course of his life. In infancy or early childhood he was removed from his native town of Halifax to Elk Marsh, his father's plantation in the same county. After reaching manhood, he took up his abode on the Cellar Field tract near the town of Enfield. The first house occupied by him on that tract was later burned, and he afterwards built on or near its site a handsomer and more commodious structure, to which we shall refer more at length later on in this sketch. While serving as Governor of North Carolina, his official residence in Raleigh was the building known by the imposing title of the "Governor's Palace," then recently completed, and of which his immediate predecessor in office, Governor William Miller, was the first occupant. This "palace" was a large brick building with a front portico supported by massive white pillars and stood across the southern end of Fayetteville Street, about a mile from the Capitol. It was used as a home for the Governors of North Carolina until the close of the War between the States, then being abandoned, and about ten years later transformed into the Centennial Graded School. It was afterwards demolished to make room for a more modern school building. While occupying this official residence in Raleigh, Governor Branch also had a summer home near Wake Forest, in the same county. His residence, of course, was in Washington during his service as United States Senator, Secretary of the Navy, and member of Congress. Of his home in Florida, and the circumstances which led to the removal of himself and family to that State about the time of his retirement from public life in North Carolina (in which latter State he always retained his citizenship), we have the following account in the narrative of Mrs. Eppes, heretofore quoted:

"In the meantime, Dr. Edward Bradford, who married Governor Branch's eldest daughter, Martha Lewis Henry, had moved to Florida. The glowing accounts he gave of the new country fired all the family with enthusiasm, so one after another they wended their way southward; and the year 1836 found Governor and Mrs. Branch, with three sons and two daughters, settled at Live Oak, three miles from Tallahassee—Dr. Bradford practicing medicine in the little town,

Daniel S. Donelson surveying the new Territory, Robert W. Williams serving as Surveyor-General, and Dr. James Hunter and his wife (Sarah Branch) newly arrived from the Old North State.

“Governor Branch was deeply interested in his new estate. He had purchased several thousands of acres in Leon County, where the primeval forests, as yet untouched by the hand of man, covered lofty heights and lovely valleys, and he selected as a site for his dwelling a magnificent grove of live oaks crowning a high hill overlooking the blue waters of Lake Jackson. Here he built a large and handsome residence in colonial style, and had a landscape gardener from France to lay out the grounds. A steep declivity led from the garden to a grove of magnolias, and in their midst was a beautiful spring which from its boiling depths sent forth an immense volume of sparkling water. Here Governor Branch installed a ram, which carried this delightful water to his dwelling, supplying bath-rooms and giving irrigation to the beautiful gardens surrounding the house, where rare flowers, collected from all parts of the earth, were to be found.”

Before his family removed to Florida in 1836, Governor Branch had visited that Territory more than once, and had purchased land there. The first tract which he acquired (December 27, 1833) was from the Marquis de Lafayette, it being part of a township in Leon County, which township had been granted by the United States Government to the illustrious Frenchman on the occasion of his visit to America in 1824-'25. In 1834, Governor Branch was again in Florida, and, as already stated, settled there in 1836, but legally he remained a citizen of North Carolina to the day of his death, going to Enfield to vote, and retaining the possession of his home there.

Amid the delightful surroundings of his beautiful Florida home, Governor Branch spent many of the happiest years of his life—sorrows, too, coming at intervals through the several deaths which occurred in his family while he resided there. His health being somewhat impaired in 1843-'44, he was persuaded to try a change of scene, and spent much time in travel. During the course of his journeyings, he met his old friend President Tyler, and the two found it pleasant renewing their former acquaintance. Though Mr. Tyler had been elected Vice-President as a Whig on the ticket with President Harrison (upon whose death he succeeded to the

Presidency), he was not now in sympathy with the policies of his party, a fact which drew to him many Democratic leaders and estranged many of his old Whig associates—Secretary of the Navy George E. Badger, a North Carolinian, being among the several members of his Cabinet who resigned. Before President Tyler and Mr. Branch parted, the latter was tendered the office of Governor of the Territory of Florida, and accepted the appointment. As already stated, he had declined to assume this post in 1831, when it was offered him by President Jackson.

The nomination of John Branch as Governor of the Territory of Florida was sent by President Tyler on June 4, 1844, to the United States Senate, and was duly confirmed by that body eleven days thereafter, on June 15th. The appointment was to take effect on August 11, 1844, that being the date when the commission of Governor Richard K. Call, who then filled the Executive Chair, would expire.

The office of Territorial Governor of Florida was no sinecure, and this was fully realized by Mr. Branch before he accepted the commission tendered him by President Tyler. The bloody and destructive war with the Seminole Indians in that Territory had scarcely drawn to a close; business was demoralized by an unsound financial system, made worse by the machinations of non-resident speculators; and yellow fever had gotten in its deadly work among many of the settlers. The Twenty-third Territorial Legislature, or "Legislative Council," met amid such unfavorable surroundings at the beginning of 1845; and, on the 10th of January, in that year, Governor Branch sent his official message to these lawmakers, advising ways out of the difficulties by which the people were beset, and complaining of the unjust course pursued with reference to the Territory, by the General Government. In the course of this message he said:

"It must be admitted that Florida has rights to maintain, as well as wrongs to redress, of such a character as to demand our undivided energies. With these convictions, I should be wanting in a

proper discharge of my duty were I to shrink from the high responsibility of recommending them, not only to your favorable notice, but to your efficient action.

“If ever there existed a community with well-founded claims on its Government for indemnity, it is to be found in Florida—a country highly favored by Providence, but laid waste by a ferocious and implacable foe—provoked and goaded on, not only without a provident preparation for such an occurrence, but in the prosecution of a war, to say the least, of doubtful policy. It is painful, as it is unnecessary, for me to dwell on the manner in which it was conducted and protracted. It is enough to know, as our citizens but too sensibly feel, that, by this ill-advised measure, Florida has become, through no agency of her own, an almost blood-stained wilderness, and that half a century will scarcely suffice to place her where she would have been but for the mismanagement of her Federal Trustee. Would that this were all—but not so! Through the same agency, an unwise and ruinous legislation has been inflicted on her, worse, if possible, than war, pestilence, and famine. I mean the blighting influence of a corrupt and corrupting *paper* system, so utterly rotten that I cannot undertake its dissection. * * *

“It is true that all parties now denounce the banking system, as it has existed in Florida, as a Pandora’s box, and cry aloud for the nuisance to be forthwith abated. In this I concur. But let us take care that we do not involve the innocent with the guilty in one indiscriminate wreck; for, in critical operations in surgery, the utmost caution and skill are necessary.

“In addition to all this, Florida has had indignities superadded to injuries. She has been charged with repudiating her *just* debts. Nothing can be more libelous; and, in her behalf, I feel it to be my duty to repel the charge. On the contrary, it is her anxiety to pay her *honest* debts that induces her to scrutinize the spurious demands of speculators and bank-swindlers, generated and fostered by irresponsible Federal rulers. * * *

“In making the foregoing remarks on our Federal relations, it is not my intention to question the *motives* or patriotism of any administration, either past or present, but to do justice to a people over whom I have the honor and responsibility of presiding as their Chief Magistrate, by a plain narrative of facts, which I believe to be incontrovertible; and to hold those responsible, and those only, who have been the cause of your insufferable ills. On the contrary, I should do violence to my own feelings were I not to acknowledge the debt of gratitude we owe to the patriotic officers and soldiery, both of the regular army and militia, who periled everything in this inglorious war—and that, too, under the most discouraging circumstances. And I may further add that I sincerely sympathize with them, that, from

the character of the enemy with whom they had to contend, and the country in which their operations were carried on, so few laurels have been won, though doubtless merited."

On a previous page we have shown that, during his three terms as Governor of North Carolina, Mr. Branch repeatedly urged upon the State Legislature the importance of fostering public education. His interest in this subject never abated; and, in the above mentioned message to the Legislature of Florida, he used this language:

Allow me to impress upon you the sacredness of your obligations, to the rising generation and to posterity, to extend every facility in your power to the acquisition of a liberal education. This can only be done by establishing schools in every part of your territory, to the extent of your ability."

The inefficiency and inadequate equipment of the militia of the Territory, and the unprotected state of the sea-coast, were sources of misgivings to all thoughtful men in Florida, and Governor Branch dwelt upon these matters as follows:

"The proper and efficient organization of the militia cannot be a subject of indifference when it is borne in mind that on this species of force we have mainly to rely for the defense of this, the most exposed portion of the United States. Permit me to urge its importance, and respectfully to recommend a revision of your laws so far at least as to ensure prompt and accurate returns to the Adjutant General of the United States. For the want of such returns, our citizens are comparative unarmed, and *so have been for the last thirteen years*, although engaged in a bloody war for more than half that time. Having done our duty, we may then confidently rely on the Federal Government for the fortification of our extended seaboard. This, I am gratified to learn, is now attracting the attention of Congress, and I cannot doubt that everything will be done that money and the indomitable spirit and energy of our fellow-citizens can achieve to render our exposed frontier impregnable to a foreign foe."

The honor of statehood was not accorded the Territory of Florida so soon as she thought herself entitled thereto, and Governor Branch expressed himself with his wonted force on this matter in his message:

"Under the Providence of God, Florida earnestly desires to carve out her own fortunes in her own way. She asks to be permitted to

appoint her own officers, and to make and administer her own laws; and, in thus asking, she feels that she seeks nothing but what she is justly entitled to, and what she would be recreant to her best interests and posterity were she not to insist on. She demands the rights of a sovereign State, so long withheld from her, though guaranteed by the Constitution of the United States and the Treaty of Cession. With a solitary Delegate in Congress, without even a vote to oppose aggressions on your rights, how can you expect successfully to contend for equal participation in the benefits of this glorious confederacy? Allow me, then, to advise you to gird on the armor of State sovereignty—to shake off the *old boy*, and put on the new man!

“To those of our fellow-citizens who believe that we are incapable of sustaining the expenses of a State Government, I would respectfully say that, if the estimates of our able and indefatigable Delegate are to be accredited—of which I cannot doubt—your fears are groundless. Instead of being a loss of a few dollars and cents, it will be a gain of thousands and tens of thousands. But, I would remark, that we ought not to be deterred from the pursuit of the great prize by such considerations. The right of self-government is inestimable to freemen, and ought not to be abandoned for light and trivial causes.”

Toward the conclusion of his message, Governor Branch took a brighter view of the future of the Territory over which he presided, saying:

“With a virgin soil, a genial climate, and a wise and paternal government to develop and foster her resources, Florida may yet promise herself a prosperous and happy future. Although causes beyond her control, as previously remarked, have retarded her growth and cast a shade over her territorial fortunes and good name; and, although, at the moment of throwing off the degrading yoke of vassalage, her difficulties may seem to be appalling—yet, when calmly viewed, and impartially weighed by intelligent, patriotic, and honest statesmen, Florida will have nothing to dread.”

As Mr. Branch was Governor of Florida for less than a year—from August 11, 1844, until June 25, 1845—the message from which we have made the extracts set forth above, was the only one which he sent to the “Legislative Council,” or General Assembly of the Territory, except a few brief special messages which would not be of general interest if quoted in the present sketch.

The Territory of Florida was admitted as a State into the American Union by an Act of Congress passed on the 3d of March, 1845. In order to make an even balance of the power thus added to the South in the Halls of Congress, another Territory (of opposite political tendencies) was raised to statehood by the inclusion of Iowa within the provisions of the same Act. There was great rejoicing when news was brought to Tallahassee that the Territory of Florida had been created a State. This action of Congress was especially gratifying to Governor Branch, who gave a large and brilliant reception at Live Oak in honor of the event, and invited all residents of that vicinity, as well as visitors from other parts of Florida, to attend. There is still preserved a letter from the Governor's youngest daughter, written to a schoolmate at Georgetown, near Washington City, in which is this description of the entertainment:

"Oh, I wish you could have seen Live Oak last night! All the world and his wife were bidden to help us celebrate, and everything possible was done to add to the occasion. Bonfires blazed on the edge of the grove, and lanterns were hung in the shrubbery. The house was brilliantly lighted, and from top to bottom was thrown open to the public. Across the front entrance, in large letters of living green on a white banner, was 'State of Florida,' and inside the house all was jollity and congratulation, feasting and music."

Soon after receiving official advices that Florida had been admitted into the Union, Mr. Branch (who had thus become Acting Governor of the new State) issued a proclamation, on April 5, 1845, fixing upon the 26th of May as the time when a general election should be held for the purpose of choosing a Governor, a Legislature, and a Representative in Congress. Governor Branch, being the foremost Democrat in Florida, was urged by his friends to enter the lists as a candidate for Governor of the State against the Whig candidate, Ex-Governor Call. To this proposition Mr. Branch declined to assent. Already he had "sounded all the depths and shoals of honor," and was not only willing, but anxious to return to the walks of private life. Other considerations moving him to decline fur-

ther participation in politics were Mrs. Branch's continued ill health and a set determination on his part never to relinquish his citizenship as a North Carolinian. William Dunn Moseley, a personal and political friend of Mr. Branch, was thereupon nominated by the Democratic party as Governor, and was duly elected. In the new State government, Governor Branch's nephew, Joseph Branch, became Attorney-General. The first session of the Legislature of the State of Florida met on the 23d of June, 1845, and two days later, on June 25th, Governor-elect Moseley was inducted into office. This inauguration of a successor closed the career of Governor Branch as Governor of the Territory and as Acting Governor of the State of Florida. Between the careers of Governor Branch and Governor Moseley, we may add, there was a striking similarity: both were native North Carolinians, both were graduates of the University of North Carolina, both had been Speakers of the State Senate of North Carolina, both had served as Governor of Florida, and both died on the same day.

After the expiration of his term of office as Governor of Florida, Mr. Branch remained a resident of Tallahassee. He also spent much of his time at Enfield, his old home in North Carolina. He likewise paid frequent visits to the fashionable summer resorts of that day. On the 19th of January, 1851, he suffered the loss of his beloved wife, who passed away in the sixty-fourth year of her age, after a happy married life of nearly half a century. In referring to the devoted ministrations of Governor Branch during the last illness of his wife, his granddaughter, Mrs. Eppes, says:

"Mrs. Branch's health grew steadily worse. I have said that they were lovers to the last. She was very fond of flowers, and every morning Governor Branch plucked a few pink blossoms—clove pinks, if he could find them, but of a rosy hue always—and with his own hands pinned them in the dainty folds of the sheer white kerchief, which the fashion of that day prescribed for a married lady's adornment. When at last she slept peacefully in her casket and he was called for a last look at the face which was so beautiful to him, he

turned away with a heart-broken sob, and in a few moments was back again with a cluster of tiny pink rosebuds, which he pinned on with trembling hands. As long as he lived he never failed at every visit to adorn her tomb with the bright-hued blossoms which she loved."

After the death of Mrs. Branch, Governor Branch returned to his native State, and again took up his abode at Enfield. In depicting the closing years of his life, we again quote the narrative of Mrs. Eppes, who writes of her grandfather as follows:

"Governor Branch never resigned his citizenship in North Carolina; and, after his wife's death, he spent most of his time at the old home in Enfield, coming to Florida each winter for a short stay. Though it was the old home [at Enfield], it was a new house, the original building with all its contents having been destroyed by fire. It was a most comfortable and commodious dwelling on a hill overlooking the station. A smooth lawn, with many shade-trees, led up to the house. On the right was a garden, a veritable bower of beauty; and, on the left, a very fancy stable and barn were outlined against a splendid orchard of peaches and apples, while at the back, among other buildings, was an icehouse, all combining the beauties of fairy-land with practical uses.

"Here he entertained his friends, for to him hospitality was one of the cardinal virtues, and here he made his children warmly welcome, and urged strongly that some of them should live with him; but, at last, even his widowed daughter, Mrs. Read, married again and left him, so in the Winter of 1853 he was married to Mrs. Mary E. Bond, of Bertie—a lovely woman, who proved an admirable companion for his declining years.

"Governor Branch's religious convictions were of the strongest, and he had the deepest respect for all things sacred. Late in life he united with St. John's Church in Tallahassee, and his confirmation service was a beautiful sight. Just before the morning service he walked alone up the aisle—tall, spare, and erect, with eyes of clearest blue, and abundant hair of snowy whiteness. At the altar he was met by the Bishop of Florida, the Right Reverend Francis H. Rutledge. He, too, had snow-white hair, and in his robes was most imposing. The morning sun came stealing softly in; and, when Governor Branch knelt and the venerable Bishop placed his hands upon his head, the rays of the sun crowned them both with a halo of glory, and we, the spectators, felt that it was God's own benediction on His good and faithful servants."

As might be expected of a States' Rights Democrat of the Calhoun school, Governor Branch stood loyally by his native State when it seceded from the Union, and became a faithful citizen of the Confederate Government. He ministered unceasingly to the needs of those who had enlisted in defense of the South, and his purse was ever open to relieve the necessities of the dependent ones they had left at home. By the hand of death he was spared the horrors of Reconstruction, but did not escape altogether the afflicting consequences of the war, for his favorite nephew (General Lawrence O'Bryan Branch) was slain early in the conflict, and other members of his immediate family were sharers of the dangers by which the land of their birth was beset.

Governor Branch died at Enfield, in his native county of Halifax, North Carolina, on the 4th day of January, 1863. It was his good fortune to retain his mental and physical vigor to the last. The brief illness, which terminated his earthly career, was pneumonia, contracted while riding horseback to direct the operations of an ice-plow. At a time when countless messages, by telegraph and mail, bore tidings of the death in battle of hundreds of the younger generation of Southerners, the peaceful passing away of "an old man, broken with the storms of State," may not have attracted the attention of the country at large to such an extent as it would in more peaceful days, but his death was mourned sincerely by those who had known his worth. In commenting upon this event, the *Raleigh Register*, of January 14, 1863, said: "He bore the weight of years with more elasticity than any man we ever saw; for, when he had passed four-score years, his person was more erect and his step more springy than many a man of half his years could boast of. It may be truly and emphatically inscribed on his tombstone that he was a man of the most sterling integrity." In a Florida newspaper, published at the time of Governor Branch's death, there is a tribute from an old acquaintance, who said: "Born at the end of the American Revolution, this aged patriot lived to wit-

ness the dissolution of the Union then formed, and to pass away amid the convulsions which now shake the continent." The same writer said of Governor Branch's political tenets: "A strict constructionist, he was ever sternly opposed to all encroachments upon the rights of the States and the people; and, though retired from public life, the influence and weight of his moral character and intellect were always given in resistance to the spirit of Northern fanaticism and lust of power, and in upholding the rights and liberties of his native South. A patriot of the early days, reared in an age made illustrious by the virtues of Macon, the genius of Randolph, and the patriotism of the associated statesmen of their day, he soon acquired a correct knowledge of the Constitution of his country and the structure of her Government, which, under the guidance of his liberal mind, enabled him to sustain himself with honor in every contest and in every station he was called upon to fill."

Several likenesses of Governor Branch are in existence. The one accompanying this sketch is from an oil portrait, in the Navy Department at Washington, which was copied from a miniature painted by Anna C. Peale in 1818, during Mr. Branch's term as Governor of North Carolina. Another portrait, painted later in life, hangs in the Hall of the Philanthropic Society at the University of North Carolina.

It is not the purpose of the present writer to attempt a eulogy, or even a studied portrayal of the character of John Branch. The foregoing pages give some record of his official actions in the various high stations which were conferred upon him, and those actions speak for themselves. They show that he was no time-serving politician, but a fearless, firm, wise, and patriotic statesman, whose fidelity to a public trust was never shaken by thirst for office (though many offices he had) or by any other selfish consideration. It may be truly said of him that—

"He would not flatter Neptune for his trident,
Or Jove for his power to thunder."

At one time it was the expressed wish of Governor Branch that he should be buried in Florida by the grave of the wife of his earlier years; but later, when his life's long journey was nearing its end, he declared his utter indifference on this point. "I am convinced," he said, "that this body is but as a worn out garment which we cast aside; and that in the world of spirits, to which I am going, there are no limitations of time and space." And so, when the end came, the mortal remains of John Branch were laid to rest in the family burial ground at Enfield, within the bounds of the historic county which gave him birth.

"'Tis little: but it looks in truth
As if the quiet bones were blest
Among familiar names to rest
And in the places of his youth."





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