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"That He Should Be Made Manifest"

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Mrs. Battle at the Dedication

In Memoriam

MARTHA BAGBY BATTLE

Dec. 16, 1869—Feb. 10, 1954

wife of George Gordon Battle

My sister grew into a beautiful young woman and quickly attained a reputation for her wit and charm. Her father did not approve of dancing, so she never learned to dance. A story is told of a visit she paid to friends in Augusta, Georgia. There I have been told, it has become a legend how she attended a Corillion, where she sat up in the gallery, and so many young men flocked up there to see her that it broke up the dance! At the University of Virginia and at the White Sulphur Springs, where she went as a Society Correspondent for a Richmond paper, she became a noted "Belle". She made many young friends, but also won the hearts of older people, many of whom brought much pleasure into her life by having her as their guest in their homes and on their travels.

I have said that my sister went every year of her young life to visit at "Piedmont". There was a site on this estate called the "Campbell Field", so named because it had once been the home of the Misses Campbell. That these two old ladies lived to be way over a hundred years old was because, it was said, they drank the water from a mineral spring on the place! A walk to the "Campbell Field" to gather chestnuts and to see the mag-



Martha Bagby Battle

nificent view of the Blue Ridge Mountains, was a favorite pastime of the children of the Jones family and their enthusiastic young guest. Many times in these years, Martha Bagby would say, "When my ship comes in I want to buy the "Campbell Field". After the marriage of Norvell Caskie Jones to Mr. Egbert G. Leigh, Jr., Mr. Leigh built a handsome new home at "Piedmont" for his bride. About this time my sister's ship did come in. Her husband, George Gordon Battle, bought the "Campbell Field" and gave it to his wife. There she built a home where she happily spent most of the summers for the rest of her life.

Though my sister out-lived many of her contemporaries, she made new

Martha Bagby Battle

I have been asked to write a sketch of my sister's life. In my present state of shock, this is a painful task to undertake, but I will do my best to tell the boys and girls of the Blue Ridge School something of the life and personality of their benefactor and friend, Mrs. George Gordon Battle.

Martha Bagby was born on December 16, 1869, at "Lichfield", in Orange Co., Virginia, then the home of her grandmother, Mrs. Lewis Webb Chamberlayne. She was the daughter of the well known author and humorist, Dr George W. Bagby, and his wife, Lucy Parke Chamberlayne.

Soon after her birth her parents, moved to Richmond. As my sister was a number of years older than I, I have no personal recollection of her childhood and early girlhood. I do know from older members of the family that she was a pretty child, and full of wit and mischief. When she was about five years old, she began her yearly visits to "Piedmont", in Orange County, then the home of Mr. and Mrs. Philip B. Jones, whose daughters were my sister's dear friends. She was educated at Miss Augusta Daniel's School in Richmond. From the delightful and cultivated women who taught her, and from the cultural surroundings in her own home, my sister absorbed her love of good literature and poetry. To the end of her life she could recite from memory many beautiful poems that she had learned as a child in school. Though she left school when quite young, she could sometimes confound college graduates by quotations from classics.



Martha Bagby Battle House

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friends every year of her life. These knew her to be a charming, gracious lady, but not many knew of the handicaps her gallant spirit had overcome. When she was a child, she had a severe attack of rheumatic fever, which left her with weakened heart muscles. Scarcely a week after her marriage, while she was on her honeymoon, she was seized with another acute attack of this disease, which kept her bed-ridden for many months, and left her lamed for life with a stiffened hip. About a year after this attack, she had recovered sufficiently to visit her husband's family in North Carolina. Only a few days after her arrival, the house was set on fire by the cook's husband. The house was burned to the ground. My sister's life was saved by her being thrown out of a second story window by her husband's nephew, who lost his life in saving hers. She was terribly burned and again laid up for many months. Mercifully, her lovely face was not scarred. Through these desperate illnesses, and others, she was a good patient, never complaining, never irritated. Throughout her life she was totally without vanity and never given to self-pity.

After this tragedy she, at last, two years after her wedding, was able to go to New York to take up her married life. There she regained her health and beauty and became a very popular young New York matron. At social gatherings she was always surrounded by a circle of admiring friends: she had the ability to entertain a large group as easily as a few. Though she never had any of her own, she had a great love for children and they for her; she could even evoke delighted smiles and chuckles from infants in arms by her inimitable way of talking to them. She had a peculiar sympathy for the Negro race and a real affection for all of them with whom she was associated.

There were, however, more serious sides of life which occupied her time and her thinking. She shared her husband's interest in politics and often went with him to Democratic Conventions. At one time she was a member of the New York Democratic Committee. She actively engaged in such work as selling Bonds during the First World War. Also, she became actively interested in many charities and philanthropies. I do not know the names of all of the organizations to which she belonged. I do know, however, that she was vitally interested in

"The Association for the Preservation of Virginia Antiquities", and in the "R. E. Lee Memorial Foundation". She had attended a meeting of the Lee Foundation on the day before her death. I have just received a letter from the Executive Director of the Herald-Tribune Fresh Air Fund, in which he told me that my sister had been a contributor for forty one years. We all know about her interest in the Blue Ridge School.

In spite of her remarkable social gift and her genuine interest in everyone, she was never dependent on companionship. She loved a quiet life at home, its every day occurrences, and the opportunity it gave her for reading, of which she never tired. In her marriage to George Gordon Battle in 1898, she was greatly blessed. He was as beloved as she was. During their fifty one years of life together, they never faltered in their devotion and their delight in each other's companionship. They were in complete accord in their love for the Church, in their abiding faith in God and the efficacy of prayer.

I regret that it had to fall to me to write this sketch of Martha Battle's life. Coming from a sister in the full flush of grief, this attempt to describe her may be thought exaggerated. In very truth it is not. What I have written is attested to by the several hundred letters received since her death. They have come from devoted friends in all walks of life, who have felt the impact of her personality. In one of these a friend wrote—"She was always beautiful, always witty, always kind". Another, one of her attendants wrote—"A bright and shining star has been extinguished".

As Shakespeare wrote of Cleopatra—

"Age cannot wither her, nor custom change her infinite variety".

ELLEN M. BAGBY

Presentation Address Delivered at the Blue Ridge School April 28, 1953, by Mrs. J. Winston Fowlkes

We are here today for a two-fold purpose—to honor a very great lady, Martha Bagby Battle, and to draw closer to this School which is becoming increasingly more meaningful to us who work for it in New York.

It is seldom that the success of an enterprise can be attributed so directly to the spark of one woman. It was some forty years ago that Dr. Mayo, then a young missionary fired with the ambition of starting a school for children in the mountains of Virginia, approached Mr. George Gordon Battle for help in this undertaking. Mr. Battle turned to Mrs. Battle for ideas. She enlisted the interest of a small group of her friends; a benefit bridge party was the first event; a dance was held the following year, and a similar

party has been held every year since in spite of two wars, a depression and the inevitable aging of the original dancers. The total amount realized from the benefits to date and sent to the School for its general running expenses is \$99,102.35.

When some of us started working with Mrs. Battle for the Blue Ridge Dances we knew very little about the School. It was a hazy thought somewhere down among the blue mists of the mountains of Virginia, but the dynamic spirit of Mrs. Battle drew us to her and we knew that anything she believed in was worth working for. The remarkable part is that so many of the original group have carried on through the years, and now the third generation is being drawn into the circle.

Just ten years ago the New York Auxiliary was organized. It was realized that it was too much to expect Mrs. Battle to continue with the total responsibility of the benefit, and there was no other personality who could carry on in her inimitable and charming manner, so an organization had to be established to insure continuity. By this time we had begun to be more curious of the actual facts about the School. What type of children did it care for? What training did it give them? Who were the faculty? What physical resources did it have? This resulted in an exchange of visits. As you know, at various times members of the faculty and students have attended our meetings in New York and members of the New York Auxiliary have visited the school. This Spring trip today is the culmination of our desires that a really representative group from New York should see for themselves the cause to which they have had so much satisfaction in lending their assistance.

And the more we learn about Blue Ridge the greater is the appeal. It seems to me that I know of no institution which to the same extent has risen above physical handicaps and placed its emphasis on the true values of life—the values of moral integrity, courage, joy, and Christian faith.

But as in all things in this world, the more adequate the tools the more efficient the job. It is for this reason that the Building Fund was started so that our contribution could be greater than could be achieved possibly by the annual parties. Mrs. Gregg has outlined to you at luncheon that story and its results. All of these accomplishments stem directly from the inspiration, the vision and the continued good works of Mrs. Battle and we are honored that we can so honor her by presenting this building to the Blue Ridge School.

Mr. Loving, as President of the New York Auxiliary, in fulfillment of a resolution adopted under date of January 17, 1945, by the New York Auxiliary of the Blue Ridge School of Virginia, I am happy on behalf of that Auxiliary to present to you the Martha Bagby Battle House.