

THE BATTLE BOOK

CHAPTER I

WESTWARD HO!

The movement of the Battle family like that of the English speaking race in general has been steadily westward. Its history in the Old World has not been studied. No written records are known that bind together the family on the two sides of the ocean. Only traditions remain and these are but slight. William Sumner Battle¹ says the first account he had of the Battle family was that their former residence was in Yorkshire, England, whence, disgusted by the passage of some ecclesiastical edicts, they fled to Ireland as an asylum and stayed there two years, only to be driven thence by the same edicts. Being dissenters from the established religion of the day there was no alternative left them but to flee still further and they made their way to Virginia, as we know from other sources, in the years 1653 and 1654. What their form of belief was is purely guess-work. As Cromwell was then in power, they could not have been fleeing Anglicanism. That they came to Virginia rather than New England would indicate that they were not Puritans. That their descendants in North Carolina less than a century later were Baptists would lead us to think that they were not Anglicans. Possibly they were Baptists before they left England.

The Battles did not come to Virginia by themselves: with them were Hunters. Sumners, Bakers, etc., connected by marriage and other ties, evidently a considerable company. Most of them are said to have been in good circumstances in England. They certainly secured good grants of land in Virginia.

The name in England was spelled in almost as many ways as Shakespeare: Battaille, Battaile, Battayll, Battelle, Battell, Batelle, Battile, Battel. Battle. Batle, Battles, Batles. The origin of the name is purely a matter of conjecture, but probably we have a place-name, for example, John of the Battle, John who lived near the battlefield, or possibly in some village called after a battle. Indeed there is actual record of a John of Battle as a member of a jury in the time of Cromwell. What particular battle gave rise to the name, or whether it came from more than one is not clear. There is a village in Lincolnshire called Battle Flats, after the battle of Stamford Bridge, fought in the fifth century. Battle, a town in Sussex, got its name from the battle of Senlac or Hastings, fought close by. President Battle, of Chapel Hill, N. C., was so partial to the possible Senlac origin of the name that he called his home Senlac.

As uncertain as the origin of the name is the race of the family. The longer spelling would indicate French—Norman or Huguenot. William Sumner Battle's story of religious dissatisfaction in the 17th century might point to a Huguenot origin, though Huguenots were usually well-treated in England. The

¹ See Chapter II.

use of the papal cross crosslet in the Battayll or Battaille crest might indicate Church devotion long before the days of the Huguenots.

In modern days, besides Charles Lamb's old Sarah Battle (now with God) who next to her devotions loved a good game at whist, and Thomas Hood's Ben Battle who was a soldier hold, there have been sundry respectable wearers of the name in England. The Mayor of Lincoln in 1881 was a Battle, and a year or two ago the London Directory showed a clergyman and a physician and sundry more of the name.

Wherever the Battles came from, whoever they were, whyever they left England, once in America they acquired land and ever more land, worked hard and prospered comfortably. From Virginia they pushed on into North Carolina and became possessed of extensive tracts, especially in Hertford, Edgecombe, Nash, and Onslow counties. Seeking more land they emigrated to Georgia, Tennessee, Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana, Texas. Land-hunger seems to have been in the blood. Land so long meant wealth and influence that even the ruin of the Civil War and Reconstruction did not eradicate it. Under changed conditions land has meant poverty rather than wealth, divers Battles have been land-poor, and now most of the family land has gone into other hands, but even yet love of land still leads many a Battle city-dweller to look regretfully to the farm of his birth. The westward urge did not stop with Louisiana and Texas. There are numerous representatives of the family in Utah and on the Pacific Coast. In the service of the nation others have gone still further west to the Hawaiian Islands and the Philippines.

On the whole the Battles seem to have deserved well of their country. They are no longer only Baptists—there are Episcopalians, Presbyterians, Roman Catholics, followers of all sorts of faiths—but they are apt to look on religion as a serious matter and in religion they often find a source of public spirit. The leading facts are to be found in the Genealogical Tables.

So far as is known to the compilers of this book, no connection has been traced between the Battle family and any that spells its name differently. Yet the fact that the earliest Virginia Battles spelled their name also Battell and Batell makes a connection not improbable.



Map of the Southern Provinces printed for R. Baldwin, London, 1755.