

COLONEL WILLIAM BALL
OF
VIRGINIA
THE GREAT-GRANDFATHER
OF
WASHINGTON

By
EARL L. W. HECK



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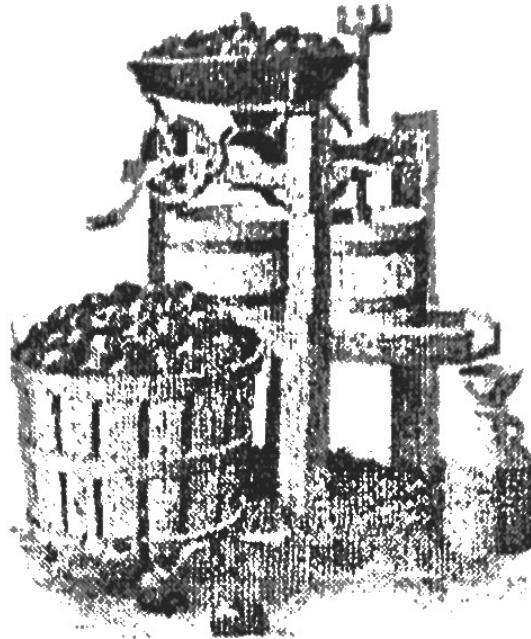
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PREFACE.

As the two-hundredth anniversary of the birth of Washington draws near, there has been a noticeable revival of interest in the Colonial history of America, and the beginning of the nation. Mary Ball, the mother of Washington, has shared the praise of her illustrious son; historians have been at work for nearly two centuries endeavouring to trace the English ancestry of the Virginia Balls. The family, originating at the time of the Norman Conquest, had numerous branches in practically every county in England by the sixteenth century, and it is not surprising, therefore, to find the problem of determining the specific branch from which Mary Ball is descended, a most perplexing one.

An effort has been made in the present work to trace the parentage of Colonel William Ball on the basis of heraldry. That he was one of a family of four or five brothers who came to America between 1619 and 1650 seems highly probable, and there is much evidence that he was born in Virginia and went to England at an early age, to return finally to America about 1650 and to settle permanently in Lancaster County, Virginia.

I have made use of the Virginia Colonial records and have found much valuable information relative to the life of Colonel Ball in the William and Mary College Quarterly and the Virginia Magazine of History and Biography. Hayden's "Virginia Genealogies" contains a wealth of interesting material on the Ball family never published elsewhere.

I am very much indebted to the Superintendent of the Reading Room and the Keeper of Manuscripts of the British Museum, who have placed valuable material before me. I must also thank the rector of the Church of St. Helen, Bishopsgate, London, for permission to consult the Church records. Thanks are also due to the Librarian of the Record Office, Guildhall, for opportunity of consulting the files contained therein.

E.L.W.H.

Richmond, Surrey.
January, 1928.

I. ANCESTRY.

COLONEL WILLIAM BALL OF VIRGINIA. THE GREAT-GRANDFATHER OF WASHINGTON.

I. ANCESTRY.

THE surname Ball, according to the best authorities¹ dates from Norman times and is a shortened form of Baldwin, which family were for many generations Counts of Flanders. In fact, William the Conqueror married Matilda, the daughter of Baldwin VIII, and many of his immediate family came to England. After the Conquest the name appears to have been shortened and was spelt various ways as Balle, Bale, Baell. Bradley points out that Baell corresponds to the Anglo-Saxon Bael, meaning funeral pile; while Ball is only a partial equivalent of the Saxon Bald, meaning bold.² Wright gives a plausible explanation that the name Baldwin may mean one who is bold enough in battle to win.³ Both Camden and Bardsley and other writers upon the subject agree that the name is not derived from "bald."

From the beginning of the sixteenth century the name had assumed its present-day spelling and the family was widely scattered over England; and, in fact, there are few county records from 1500 onward which do not mention

1. Camden and Bardsley.

2. Bradley, L. A., History of the Ball family, N.Y., 1916, p. 15.

3. Wright, W. B., Ball Family Records, York, 1908, p. 1.

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the name, which seems, however, to be more prominent in Kent, Middlesex and Northamptonshire. Mr. H. B. Guppy, writing on the homes of English surnames, is of the opinion that the Ball family found in the West of England in the Counties of Lancashire, Stafford, Warwick, and Gloucester, is distinct from the branch on the east side in Norfolk, Suffolk, and Essex.'

There have been few Colonial American pedigrees more difficult to trace in England than that of Colonel William Ball, the great-grandfather of Washington on his mother's side. And there are few other instances where such a long and persistent effort has been made to determine the English branch without much success. As early as 1745 Joseph Ball, a grandson of Colonel Ball, came to England and spent a number of years trying to determine the precise branch.² Unfortunately Colonel Ball has given us very little or no contemporary information regarding his family and few of his original family documents are extant which might give a clue to the name of his parents. Upon examining the parish and county records of the kingdom one finds between the years 1610—1625 over twenty persons bearing the same name to have been born.

Fortunately, however, Colonel Ball did bring with him to Virginia an illuminated parchment on which was engraved the Coat of Arms of his family. This parchment has long been in the possession of a branch of the Ball family in Lancaster County, Virginia. Some years ago, a member of that family, being in London, had a copy of the Coat of Arms of the Northamptonshire Balls prepared from the original in the office

1. London, 1890.

2. Hayden, Horace E., *Virginia Genealogies*, 1891, pp. 47-52.

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of the College of Heralds. Upon returning to Virginia he found that the two matched in every detail. It is assigned in the College of Heralds to the Reverend Richard Ball, D.D., son of Lawrence Ball, of Northamptonshire, and was granted December 22nd, 1613, by Sir W. M. Segar Garter.

Sometime before, however, Lossing had described a similar Coat of Arms in the possession of a direct descendant of Colonel Ball, "a rampant lion holding a globe in his paw, a helmet and shield, a vizor strong, and a coat of mail and other emblems of strength and courage."¹ A quotation from Ovid is taken as the motto, "Coelum qui Tueri." On the back of this parchment is written the following inscription dated 1779: "Colonel William Ball, who came from England with his family about the year 1650 and settled at the mouth of the Corotoman River in Lancaster Co., Virginia, and died in 1669, leaving two sons, William and Joseph, and one daughter, Hannah, who married Daniel Fox. William left eight sons (and one daughter), five of whom have now male issue. Joseph's male issue is extinct. General George Washington is his grandson by his youngest daughter, Mary."² In 1891 this parchment was owned by J. Flexner Ball, of Ditchley.³ One of the most curious things about the above inscription is that it says Colonel Ball died in 1669, whereas we have every reason to believe that he lived until 1680.

1. Lossing, B. J., Mount Vernon and its associations, N.Y., 1859, p. 19.

2. Ibid.

3. Hayden, H. E., Va. Gen., p. 49.

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The description of the Ball Coat of Arms agrees in main with the one in the College of Heralds for the Northamptonshire branch, except for the fact that the crests are a bit different, for in the latter the helmet and shield are lacking. Burke mentions fifteen different armorial bearings as being conferred on as many families by the name of Ball throughout England. To the Northamptonshire branch for 1613 he ascribes. "Argent a lion pass. sa. on a chief of the second three mullets of the first. Crest out of clouds ppr. a demi lion ramp. sa. powdered with estoiles ar. holding a globe or." Inasmuch as Burke mentions nothing that agrees precisely with Lossing's descriptions, and because the two are similar, except in a few minor details, we infer that the Lancaster County Arms mentioned by Wright were the original, and the one, mentioned by Lossing and belonging to a direct descendant of Colonel William Ball, is a slight modification of the original.

On the other hand, Hayden relates that Lossing repeated the description originally given by Bishop Meade, who knew nothing of heraldry and gave a distorted notion regarding it.² Such criticism might lead one to infer that there was only one Coat of Arms among the Balls of Virginia.

Yet, as a matter of fact, there are other reasons why it seems highly probable that two different crests did exist in Virginia, and that one represented the original as possessed by the Rev.

1. Burke, *The General Armory*, London, 1884, p 44. Add. MSS 12,225 fo. 7.

2. Hayden, H. E., *Va. Gen.* p. 50.

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Richard Ball, while the other was intentionally altered so as to represent a different branch.

Besides William, five other men bearing the same surname came to America prior to 1650.

A Robert Ball was on the Eastern Shore in 1623,¹ Richard Ball came to America in the "George" in 1619.² Another Richard Ball is mentioned as living in Elizabeth City, Va., in 1627, and was probably the same as the one mentioned above. Still another Richard Ball came in the transport "Assurance" in 1635³ to Virginia. But inasmuch as the name Virginia was then often used to denote the whole of British North America, he or one of the other Richard Balls hitherto mentioned may have been the Richard Ball who was at Salisbury, Wells, and Dorchester, Mass. Bradley, who writes mainly of the New Haven branch of the Balls, states that Alling and William Ball came over with the Rev. Mr. Davenport and settled in New Haven, their names first appearing in the records of that town in 1643. William is known to have died prior to 1650 and is not to be confused with Colonel William Ball. There has been, it appears, a tradition of long standing in the family of Alling Ball that originally three brothers came to America, not all at once, but at different intervals, and that two of them settled in Virginia.

To support this tradition, some years after the death of Washington, one of the New Haven

1. Ibid.

2. Ibid.

3. Hotten, J. C., *Emigrants to America*. London. 1874. p. 113.

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Balls produced a Coat of Arms of Alling Ball to show that he was the third cousin of the great Virginian.¹ Curiously enough this Coat of Arms corresponded with that of the Northamptonshire Balls, but bearing for its motto, "Semper Caveto."²

Hayden had long entertained the opinion that Colonel Ball was born in Virginia and was the son of Richard Ball, of Elizabeth City. In the light of the knowledge derived from the Connecticut branch, he later is of the opinion that Colonel William was the youngest brother of a family of five who came to America. Of these, Richard, the eldest, and William came to Virginia, and John, Francis, and Alling went to New England.³ This same genealogist, with no small degree of plausibility, is of the opinion that the name of Colonel William Ball's father was Richard, because both his eldest brother and son bear that name.

In the light of all this evidence it seems very highly probable that the Rev. Richard Ball, Vicar of St. Helen's, Bishopsgate, was the father of Richard and William Ball of Virginia and Alling Ball of Connecticut. The existence of three different Coats of Arms is especially favourable to this view, for it would be entirely consistent with the rules of heraldry that Richard being the eldest son should take the Arms of his father: that the second son Alling should change the motto, and that William, the youngest son, should add a different crest from that of the other two.

1. Hayden, H. E., *Va. Gen.* pp. 50-52.

2. Bradley, L. A., *Hist. of the Ball Family.*

3. Hayden, p. 49.

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In the Visitation of London, 1633 and 1634, and of Surrey in 1662, the pedigree of Nicholas Ball, of St. Michealy, Crooked Lane, London, the son of "Richard Ball, of Northampton, and Elizabeth, daughter of William Young, of London, descended out of Stafford," is given with a Coat of Arms similar to the one already described, with the exception that the lion in the crest is holding a branch of a flower instead of a globe of gold.¹ We know, from an entry for January 6th, 1616, in the Registers² of St. Helen's, Bishopsgate, that Elizabeth was the name of the Rev. Richard's wife. There is the possibility that Nicholas was another son who remained in London.

Wright is of the opinion that one of Colonel Ball's elder brothers was John Ball of Kent, who made a name for himself on account of his piety, and who later won the respect and confidence of Fuller, a writer and preacher of Northampton.

Relative to the life and career of the Reverend Richard Ball, we receive the following information gathered from the records of St. Helen's, Bishopsgate.³

"Richard Ball was educated at Magdalen College, Oxford, where he took the degree of Bachelor of Arts in 1590, and of Master in 1594. Upon the settlement of Gresham College (1596), Mr. Ball and Mr. Caleb Willis were recommended by the University of Oxford, for one of

1. Harleian MSS. 1.444. fo. 35 b; 1,476 fo. 105. Add. MSS. 553 p. 112.

2. Edited by W. B. Bannerman, London, 1904, p. 16.

3. Cox, John Edmund, "The Annals of St. Helen's, Bishopsgate," London, 1876, pp. 314-15.

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them to be chosen to be the first Professor of Rhetoric on that foundation. Mr. Willis was chosen, but being in a bad state of health, by leave of the Gresham Committee, he appointed Mr. Ball to read for him, who was afterwards chosen to be his successor. In 1603 he became Vicar of St. Helen's Church, where he established a lectureship in 1606. Upon January 14th, 1613, he resigned his Professorship, and about the same time he was succeeded in the Vicarage of St. Helen's by Mr. Thomas Downing. He must have been about forty years of age, but whether he died, or had some other preferment that occasioned his removal, is uncertain."

It will be noticed that Dr. Ball left St. Helen's the year he received his Coat of Arms. There is a possibility he left London for Northampton, or, inasmuch as he was still comparatively a young man, he may have been the Richard Ball who was in Elizabeth City, Virginia, as early as 1623. for we know that Ministers of the Church of England went early to that American Colony. Hayden earlier concurs to the opinion that Richard Ball, of Virginia, was the father rather than the eldest brother of Colonel William Ball. We find in the St. Helen's Register that a daughter, Rebecca, was born to Richard Ball, "Parson of St. Helen's and Elizabeth his wife," in 1616 and in 1631, "Mr. Ball" received the sum of £195 15s. 9d. from St. Helen's. The Rev. Dr. Cox is of the opinion that no other than the Rev. Richard is meant by "Mr. Ball."¹ We find, however, upon inspecting this itemized bill that thirty-six pounds were for travelling

1. Ibid, p. 223.

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and other sundry expenses. Should the Rev. Richard Ball have been recalled from Virginia to St. Helen's, we should expect that his expenses would have been something near that sum.

We cannot as yet give a final judgment upon this much debated question, but the data on hand up to the present day greatly favour the opinion that Colonel William Ball, the ancestor of Washington, was a younger son of the Reverend Richard Ball, of St. Helen's, Bishopsgate, London, and is of the Northamptonshire branch of this widely-scattered English family.