

(editor's note: This paper was transcribed from a handwritten cursive copy with various difficulties. For a perfect rendition, the reader might wish to consult the original, itself a copy, in the volume entitled *Literary Club Papers I*, 1885 – 1886 Oct 3, '85 to May 29, '86) The original is very badly faded.

## An Affair of Honor

Something more than forty years ago, there lived in this city two men who made a sensation for a day, and within a restricted circle. The death of General Erwin a few days ago, recalled the incident, the particulars of which were obtained from the only remaining witness. It was an Affair of Honor.

The two principals were distantly related by marriage, and had lived for many years in close friendship; but on account of some unfortunate family matter they became estranged, and had after that become bitter enemies. One of them was a surgeon. He was a large man of fine presence and unusually good address and he was much given to praises of himself, and of his professional successes. He took equal interest in military affairs, and just after the Mexican War, he spent much time with the officers in the Barracks at Newport, who, at that time were well supplied with campaigning stories, and were filled with the soldier spirit. The doctor had gone into Texas during the war, and claimed to have done many wonderful things in camp and field, even in Mexico, but it was not certain that he ever crossed the Rio Grande. He was fond of intimating very plainly that if he had gone regularly into the army he would have come back a general, if by a miracle he could have escaped death in the front line.

The other man was small in person, and so utterly negative in character that he had little about him which could be taken hold of to describe. He was amiable, rather idle, always even tempered; very modest, and unusually reticent. He was a book-keeper, but not dependent on his salary. So quiet man was he that he although he had scores of warm friends, he lived unmentioned.

During the progress of the quarrel between him and the doctor, it was the latter's daily habit to take advantage of every possible occasion to insult, belittle, and mortify him. But nothing ever succeeded in bringing out a retort or a counter-blow. The merchant's clerk was as impassive as putty, and generally as silent as a salted mackerel.

This of course confirmed the Dr. in his conviction that he had nothing to fear, and he set no bounds to his ugliness.

One day he was dining a la militaire at Newport, and it was told him that the clerk and pronounced him a “mean, malicious liar.” Capt. Golding at once said to the doctor that he must challenge and fight the man who used such language concerning him; and in the midst of their hilarity, the doctor, not in the least fearing that he would ever hear of it again, wrote a challenge to a duel to the offender, and requested Captain Golding to act as his second.

About this captain there was no nonsense, and he presented a document the next day. The challenge was promptly accepted and the clerk asked a certain Mr. Fontleroy, who was a traveling salesman for the house of E. Dexter & Sons, whiskey merchants, – to act as his second.

To the doctor, the surprise was complete, and he began insinuating that he did not want to hurt the “poor child,” that his own wife would go crazy if she should learn that he was involved in such an affair; that he hardly thought a law-abiding citizen ought really to fight a duel, in defiance of law; that he doubted if the offensive words had ever been used; and that the thing might be settled without a hostile meeting. But Capt. Golding and the other officers were deaf to such suggestions. The place was selected; the time fixed; and the manner of fighting agreed on, and a proper paper signed by the Capt. and Mr. Fontleroy.

The day before the momentous one, the Dr. was arrested and bound over to keep the peace. His wife had informed the authorities, but the clerk could not be found. This annoyed the seconds, and the doctor was plainly told that if he did not fight, he would be posted.

Another day was fixed on, and a remote place in Kentucky selected as the field of battle; the time chosen was one hour after sunrise. The principals were to stand back to back, and at the signal, were to step away from each other 20 paces, then face about and approach each other by regular paces, each one being at liberty to fire at any time after taking two steps towards each other.

The clerk with his second and his surgeon, was on the ground ahead of time looking as quiet and non-committal as a link of smoked sausage. Before it was quite too late the others arrived, and Capt. Golding could not conceal the effects of his efforts to have his man on hand, for he had left him for 24 hours, and he had not allowed himself any sleep, for fear that the doctor

might be again arrested before he crossed the river.

The doctor himself was rather gay; he talked freely, and his nostrils dilated very wide. He had several suggestions to make in an undertone to his attending surgeon and when called, came up with a bold front.

Those old-fashioned dueling pistols were short, and carried a large round ball. They were not worth much for accuracy of aim, but the ball went with great force, and made a big hole in any thing it hit. When the ground had been looked over, the weapons were prepared by the seconds and placed in the hands of the principals, and they took their positions. When they stood back to back, the doctor appeared to be twice the size of the clerk, which offered the latter a larger target.

At the signal, each threw out his left foot and they started on a promenade, — the one towards the north, the other towards the south pole until 20 paces and been counted. They were then 40 steps apart. At the second signal they faced right about, again threw out the left foot and approached each other with the same measured tread

The doctor was evidently trying to conceal his nervousness; he did not step naturally, but with a stiffness, and his body swayed somewhat as he walked. The other man was as impassive as a dried corn-stalk; he stepped like a soldier, and carried his weapon gracefully in his right hand.

At the second pace after the signal, the doctor raised his pistol, took a careful sight, and fired. The poor clerk reeled, and his pistol fell upon the ground. His surgeons sprang forward, but the wounded man immediately regained his uprightness, then stooped and gathered his weapon in his left hand, and resumed his measured step. That was a bad moment for the doctor. He saw his antagonist coming forward, and he himself obliged to proceed to certain death. His eyeballs protruded; his face blanched; his legs shook; and he lost the step and hesitated. Then as sharp as the crack of a Gatling gun, Capt. Golding's voice rang out on the still morning air, "Stand up to your place, sir."

Alas, for the doctor. Seeming not to realize what he did, he whipped a revolver out of his hip-pocket, and fired a second shot directly at his opponent, but naturally without effect, although the ball did not go very wide of the mark; and then throwing up his arms and uttering a cry of terror,

he turned and fled. Both seconds and both surgeons in a chorus cried, "Shoot him. Kill him." but the placid book-keeper raised his pistol and fired into the air. Paralyzed by its report, or perhaps because he stumbled over a root or some inequity in the ground, the retreating Dr. fell flat, and rolled over like a fat hog, and then spring up, and ran in a frenzy of terror leaving his hat behind him, and soon disappeared from sight.

The little man had not escaped. He lay upon the ground while they cut his clothes away, and it was seen that the bullet had plowed an awful furrow along his right side, but between two ribs. He was tenderly conveyed to the river, and at Augusta put on one of the descending packets, brought home and nursed and watched by both of the surgeons and both of the seconds in the affair which had marked him, until he was fully recovered.

After the dual the doctor took his departure to a distant state where his family afterwards joined him, and where he eventually died in obscurity.

The book-keeper still walks Third Street; but he never speaks of his affair of honor

Theophilus Kemper

Budget

Hinman Editor

January 30, 1886