

(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* 2, 1886 – 1887 June 5, '86 to May 21, '87)

## Moses and the Exode

In former times there lived in Fauquier County Virginia a family named Pollock. Its head was a gentleman of rare culture and amicability, of considerable learning, and of most distinguished manners. He was a Presbyterian minister; but not having or wanting a pastorate, he devoted himself only to that class of church work which he could without inconvenience to, or interruption of his home life. He was too much of a genius to be in the least fit for practical affairs. His wife used to say of him that he was "to all business reprobate." In personal appearance, although he was larger and taller, he was remarkably like our Mr. Stevenson. From the neck upward, either might be taken for the other. He was not much of a preacher in the ordinary ways, but at the same time a charming man in the pulpit. His sermons were often soliloquies, – he seemed to be talking to himself; and he would remind one of what was said of the ancient poet Castellus (sic) "his mind sparkled." This dreaminess naturally often lead to absent-mindedness; and many stories were told of his awkward scrapes. On one occasion when he was the guest of a family while in attendance on some church assembly, he presented himself among the ladies one morning completely and carefully dressed except as to his pantaloons! These possibilities were a constant terror to his family. Once, on the occasion of a dinner party at his home a servant stood before him with a guest's plate to be replenished, he was lost in reverie; and Mrs. Pollock became so absorbed in waking him up without exposing the situation that she forgot she had turned the faucet of the coffee-urn, and that the coffee was deluging and the table and floor. They were both aroused by the boisterous laughter of the party.

Mrs. Pollock was a grand niece of Richard Henry Lee; and she inherited considerable wealth in land and slaves. They lived on their ancestral estates in that easy-going improvident way so characteristic of the Virginians of their class before the war. She was a bright woman, and possessed with much more practical common-sense than her husband had. The idol of their family was their only boy, Tom. He had bloomed into manhood, and had just opened a law-office in Warrenton when the war began. In physical comeliness, in mental cleverness, and in accomplishments, I have never yet seen Tom Pollock's equal. Of course the family were loyal to the south, and Tom went out at the very start with the famous Black Horse Cavalry. He had some kind of a position on the staff, and he was constantly in service until the fight at Gettysburg. It is known that he went into that battle, but he was never known nor heard of more. He was probably torn past recognition by some deadly missile in the red flame of that awful fury, and his fragments covered in a ditch along with heaps of others equally unknown. No comrade saw him fall. All that is known is that he went in with a charging column, and was seen no more.

There were three young lady daughters in the Pollock house, and they were as bold writers and as gay lasses as any on the Eastern shore. They remained with their parents in the homestead notwithstanding the fact that it was about in the middle of the seat of war; and they made excellent scouts for General Lee. The old tumble-down family coach with the ancient darky coachman carrying those girls traversed the County and picked up the news. Once when McClellan was camped nearby, it was just before his removal from command, Lee wanted the best information he could get; and he allowed one of his

officers to go for it. The man by night-marching, got into the Pollock house, and the young ladies transformed him into their grand-mother! The next day the old coach rattled the old lady and one of the girls pretty well over the County coming frequently to elevated points whence tents and batteries could be counted. They passed the federal lines and drove up to head-quarters to pay their respects to the general. The young lady went in and had an interview. General McClellan himself accompanied her to the carriage, was presented to the grandmother, directed a glass of wine to be brought, and was as deferential as polite men always are to the respectable old ladies; and he dismissed them with every expression of sympathy; the girl knowing all this while that detection was a death. This is only one of many such adventures.

When I visited the family in 1860 the political excitement of the day made it necessary for a Northerner to be somewhat guarded in his conversation; and Mrs. Pollock noticing it said that I should speak my mind freely on all subjects but she warned me to be careful in speaking about Moses. Moses, she said was Mr. Pollock's demi-God; and if I should happen to say anything slightly of the great Hebrew lawgiver in his presence, I might wish that I had never been born. And I let Moses severely alone.

Returning there in 1873, I found none left of the family save the old gentleman and one of the girls. The farm was neglected, and dilapidation and decay were everywhere visible. Mr. Pollock was nearing the grave, to which not long afterward he was carried; and the place has since passed to strangers. But prior to this time he had yielded to the request of his friends and had published a book upon Moses and the Exodus from Egypt of which I obtained a copy. It is to speak of this work that I have related the story of the family. Only a few copies were printed; and they were sold in the neighborhood in order to eke out sufficient to enable the author and his only surviving child to live on the farm to the end of his life. The book has 600 pages and much of it is tiresome. The style in general is heavy, and it is in places diffuse; but here and there, as one reads along, there comes a thought which sparkles like a diamond. His conception of the Exode; of the birth and development of a nation and of the events connected with their march from Egypt and their final settlement in Canaan is wonderfully grand; and his suggestions on all these superhuman occurrences which to the Orthodox mind so clearly disclose the immediate interposition of God, are quaint and original. It is not a story, the scenes of which are laid in the Exode, as Ben Hur is a story of the time of Christ; it is an historical statement, amplified from the Pentateuch, written in a pious strain, and from the Orthodox standpoint. All through it gleams with humor which one would little look for from an Orthodox writing as Mr. Pollock did, in his loneliness, and in the midst of the ruins of his once happy home.

Of the pillar of cloud, he says that its base was at least twelve miles square; because the camping-ground of 600,000 families was within it; and it had a height in proportion so that it lifted its summit into mid-air, where it could be seen through the clear atmosphere of Egypt for hundreds of miles "From day to day this pillar of cloud in a land without clouds made its steady appeal to the reflective nature of all men, and for hundreds of miles in all directions whether they were Egyptian, or Israelite, or stranger, up and down the Nile it was seen, and often the desert in all lines of Caravan-travel. And it belongs to the wonderfulness of this phenomenon that at nightfall each day, while the people of both races chiefly concerned, and of all races within view are gazing toward the wondrous cloud, it turns lurid till it becomes a pillar of clear fire in the darkness. These Orientals it

was who mapped the heavens into constellations, gazing on them from their house-tops. Think of the whole, great, nation, wonder stricken gazing from their house tops hundreds of miles away up and down the Nile Valley, in their hundreds of populous cities at that strange apparition in a cloudless sky. A cloud of columnar shape, perpendicular, stationary, towering in mid-heaven becoming a pillar of fire as each day disappears. It's dark Majesty stood unmoved with Egyptian winds blowing against it; an Egyptian sun shining upon it. The fire-pillar was not less awful in its majesty. Orion and the dog-star went timidly by in its presence. It gives light even to idolaters in the door-ways of the temples of their Gods."

After describing the plagues in their order, and having come to the time when Pharaoh gives his consent to their departure and the Israelites are ready to start, he again refers to the cloud thus: "We think that all Egypt is ablaze when, wonderful to tell, the cloud appeared to be in motion. Egypt is a panorama, and this cloud-tower and over-shadowed throng is the object-center. The spectators are tremulous with excitement, while it is every-where murmured among them as they gaze 'Sure enough; it moves!' Hundreds of miles away they see it; with star-gazing eyes they see it; And behold, it moves! It moves eastward in the direction of Succoth and the Red Sea, and the Arabian wilderness. Never since the world began hath the like of this been seen; never to lay eyes of the beholder close in death can it be forgotten.

Then in the passage of the sea, and in the long march of forty years he makes the cloud of much more importance than a mere guidepost. He thinks the mysterious bread fell out of it, and that each morning it supplied fifty-six thousand two hundred and fifty bushels of this corn of heaven; and that it whipped in the supply of quails, no insignificant supply, for it was sufficient for two and a half million of people. And the supply came, Mr. Pollack says as by a divine commission on the wings of its own, and he estimates that 6,000,000 ass-loads of birds were furnished, giving the travelers the biggest thing in the way of a quail supper known in all history. And the cloud had something to do with the water supply which followed their trail, as our author thinks, under ground. Referring to it he says: –

"There is something to my mind suitable and beautiful in the idea of the cloudy pillar occupying the upper air and spreading itself over the people, and shaking manna from its wings on the ground in the still and silent night, standing over them while they stayed and going before them while they went, and at the same time causing the water of their desert-life secretly to follow them underground ever invisible yet ever present; found wherever sought at practicable depths beneath them in the cool earth. They dug, and drew and drank, and even met at the well as journeying Jacob found Rachel, and Isaac's trusty messenger found Rebecca."

I have not space to speak of the cloud during the awful days at Sinai. All the way through Mr. Pollack makes of it the very throne of God, expressing his presence, and yet veiling his unapproachable majesty. And his conceptions of the cloud are not more lofty than his ideas of the other facts and incidents of that eventful history. Of Moses he aspires to no characterization; but him he treats as the Bible treats Jehovah. He assumes from the beginning the overshadowing greatness of the leader of the Exode, and nowhere attempts to describe him or give a statement of his qualities. He is every-where the giant, the King, the meek man of God, the pattern of his race, the ablest man of all times. I do not think that Hebrew literature furnishes a greater eulogy or so flattering a monograph on their

great man; and I am sure that the eccentric gentile who wrote those pages merits, and may some day receive the thanks of the Hebrew race. When the affairs of the Confederacy would go away, and when they finally collapsed, and left them all so broken up, Mr. Pollock only used to sigh “oh! for a Moses.” And he lived long enough to be able to look back over the events of our Civil War after the dust and smoke of battle had disappeared, and when new and wider views, and a broader patriotism had dawned upon the land; and then he saw, and did not hesitate to say that the Moses of America in his day was Abraham Lincoln.

The Exode of Israel from Egypt is the only event of its kind known to history. Two and a half millions of serfs were so organized by means of their tribes and elders, that when the time came, they all in twenty four hours filed by a flank movement out of the valley of the Nile, and formed in a long line in the sands lying between the fertile land and the sea. Inside of twenty four hours the long line, following its head, took itself like a snake over to the shore of Arabia, a distance of twelve to fifteen miles. Then commenced a regular system of education, aimed at creating an independent and powerful nation out of a horde of slaves. It took the whole life of a generation to do it; it had to deal with human nature and some of its most perverse and pig-headed phases; and at the same time with a people endowed with great physical and moral forces. Pollack suggests that the use and objects of whatever miracles were wrought, were to show them that there is a Power above nature; and thus to lift them up from the tendency and temptation to worship the forces of nature. Many of their laws were only plain sanitary regulations although promulgated as for a spiritual object; and the whole code taken together has up to this time defied the wit of man to improve upon. Whenever in public or private morals, in political economy, in social order, or in international law Jew or Gentile has departed from the fundamental ideas of the Mosaic system, he has gone backward and not forward. They were taught to be faithful to each other, and to their race in general, even if necessary at the expense of the heathens outside, the wisdom of which instruction is even to this day attested by the vitality of their blood and their social coherency.

All these considerations and many more are brought out by the author of the book of which I have just spoken, and he uniformly carries everything back to Moses, and gives him the credit for all that is good, except what is necessarily and absolutely divine.

If I were a Moses or a Maniconna, a Washington or a Jesse James, – anybody in particular who might inspire a biography after my death, I should wish no other herald, no other speaker of my actions to keep mine honor from corruption than such an honest chronicler as the late Mr. Pollock. –

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Jany 29 1887