

## MR. DAVIS' FIRST MARRIAGE

What The Sister Of Confederate President's First Wife Says.

The New York Times of October 20 contains the following interesting letter:

"Notices of Mrs. Jefferson Davis, published in the papers of the 16th, contain a statement regarding the first marriage of Mr. Davis which is entirely false. The assertion is made that his first marriage to Miss Sarah Taylor, daughter of Zachary Taylor, was a runaway match. As this slander has been persistently repeated, this seems to be the time to silence it on the authority of the sister of Sarah Knox Taylor, Mrs. Philip Pendleton Dandridge, of Winchester, Va., who is the eldest surviving 'Lady of the White House.' Many absurd misrepresentations of General Taylor's family have been long unrefuted, and this is among the most annoying.

"When General Taylor was colonel of the First Infantry, stationed at Fort Crawford (now Prairie du Chien), in 1832, his family was with him, and his second daughter, Sarah Knox, met Lieut. Jefferson Davis, who was serving under General Taylor. They soon became lovers. The relatives to this day speak of them as 'ideal lovers.' General Taylor for some time objected to Mr. Davis' suit. He did not wish his daughters to marry army men; he had seen his wife calmly and cheerfully meeting hardship and discomfort; had seen the effect on her health, and dreaded such a life for his girls. Also there had once been some little friction between him and Lieutenant Davis, which left a slight prejudice in his mind. His daughter told him (I am told this by Mrs. Dandridge) that she would never disobey him, never marry without his consent, but she would never marry anyone but Lieutenant Davis, and she said 'The time will come when you will see, as I do, all his rare qualities.'

"For a time Mr. Davis was not allowed to go to the house, but Miss Taylor, with her mother's consent and her father's knowledge, met him occasionally. She would take the two little children, Betty and Dick, who were nearest in age, always together, out to walk. Mr. Davis would soon join them and the children would be told by their sister that they might play a little while as the lovers talked. Mrs. Dandridge recalls it all.

"After an engagement of two years General Taylor entirely withdrew his opposition. There was never any estrangement between General Taylor and his daughter. He was then at the Falls of St. Anthony on an expedition against Indians and could not return, as it would have involved a journey of weeks, the mode of travel being to Mackinac boats, rowed by soldiers. But his daughter was married at Beechland, near Louisville, Ky., the home of her aunt Elizabeth, General Taylor's eldest sister, who had married her second cousin, John Gibson Taylor, in the presence of Surgeon and Mrs. Wood, Mrs. Wood being the bride's sister, another aunt and a large assemblage of members of the Taylor family.

"The young couple went to visit Lieutenant Davis' brother, Joseph E. Davis, on his plantation, the Hurricane, in Mississippi, and it was arranged that Lieutenant Davis (who had resigned from the army) should take Brierfield, part of the Hurricane tract, as his interest in his father's estate. They settled at Brierfield.

"Later in the summer, as the 'sickly season' approached, they went to visit Lieutenant Davis' sister, Mrs. Luther Smith, at her Locust Grove plantation, near Bayou Sara, Louisiana. Soon after their arrival Mr. Davis was taken very ill with malarial fever, and the day after Mrs. Davis became ill also. They were nursed in separate rooms. He was too ill to be told of her peril and delirium saved her from anxiety about him. Soon after the fever set in she succumbed to it, and, hearing her voice singing loud and clear a favorite song, 'Fairy Bells,' he struggled up and reached her bedside to find her dying. She died on September 15, 1835, and was buried in his sister's family burying ground.

"Mrs. Dandridge says Mrs. Davis was extremely pretty, small, with dark eyes, had great vivacity and charm of manner, winning everyone who knew her.

"Mr. Davis' life was despaired for a month. After he rallied he was sent—for better recovery—to Havana for the winter. He came back to Brierfield in the following spring and for eight years led a life of seclusion, seeing no visitors, his life entirely changed by his great sorrow. Through these years he was a close student—his only resource the cultivation of his mind.

"His girl wife was right; her father learned to value and admire him thoroughly. A close friendship ever existed between him and all the Taylor family, and his second wife, married in 1843, was kindly welcomed by them. Mrs. Dandridge reveres his memory and spoke lately of his remarkable dignity of character and bearing. In the Mexican War, when Mr. Davis served with such brilliancy under General Taylor, they became warm friends.

"R. H. C."

Winchester, Va. Oct. 17, 1881.