

SIDE LIGHTS ON THE HISTORY OF LOUISIANA.

GOVERNOR JOSHUA BAKER.

By MRS. T. B. ELDER.

It is recorded that this gentleman was born in Kentucky, but was reared in Louisiana. His home was in St. Mary Parish, and the beautiful Teche River. His early years were spent here, and he passed a part of the period of his life. He graduated from West Point in 1816, when, being born in 1799, he had not yet attained the age of 17.

He is remembered in Louisiana for his knowledge of bridge building, and for these in different parishes under his supervision.

At the time, 1829, he was appointed Judge of St. Mary Parish, and while always occupied with his judicial interests, he found time to promote the steamboating industry and also the lumber trade.

He was appointed Governor by Hancock, who was then in command of the Gulf Department. The appointing of Mr. Baker to be Governor of "lawless Louisiana" showed the wisdom of General Hancock. He knew well the misrule, oppression and oppression exercised by the administrators in goading the people of the South to vindictive reprisals, and his choice of Governor Baker, a consistent Union man and a patriot, was soothing to the people who were being tortured by the reconstruction harpies.

The Southern General, Dick Taylor, says of this Northern General, Hancock, that "he was one of the most distinguished officers of the United States Army, and he immediately restored order and confidence" (in New Orleans).

And it is well to learn that it was General Dick Taylor himself who, in an interview with President Johnson, advised him to send General Hancock to command the Gulf Department.

Governor Baker's kindly ways and his instincts gave a brief sunlight to the reconstruction darkness. He did not hold the office a year, and an unusual episode marks his term. The men elected to represent Louisiana in Congress were admitted on the ground that the State was not yet properly "reconstructed."

And this is what reconstruction really was and what it should have been. It was an usurpation of power by men, chiefly negroes, without character or intelligence, who prescribed what a Senator must be in order to be qualified, namely, to take the "test oath" of 1865. These rulings were arrogant and impudent, because the State Constitution had already provided an oath which left to those compelled to take it some spark of self-respect, and the whisperings of the manly dignity of American freemen.

Reconstruction fanatics introduced a bill to open the common schools to all children "without distinction of race, color, and, in order to exasperate the white race, made attendance at the schools compulsory.

This measure, with the disfranchisement of every Southern soldier, and the law-making power in the hands of illiterate negroes, was Louisiana's doom.

It might have been so different if the people had held sway and intelligence had ruled, instead of injustice, prejudice and ignorance unspeakably.

Governor Baker had little part in all this scheme of tyranny, and was always conceded to be an honorable, conservative Democrat and a consistent opponent of secession.

He died many years after the war in the city of Connecticut, at the home of his daughter, his heartstrings still clinging to his Louisiana home. When the news of his death reached the friends along the borders of the Teche it brought also the conviction that a good man had passed to his reward.

His descendants are among Louisiana's most worthy citizens, and one who bears that name is at present Judge of one of our criminal courts, and his decisions for justice and equity have never been excelled nor equalled.

MIN FRANKLIN FLANDERS.
This gentleman was "created" military governor of Louisiana by General Sheridan, U.S.A., in June 1867. His office, or perhaps its surroundings, must have been distasteful to him, for he resigned the governorship after an occupancy of only six months.

Mr. Flanders was born in New Hampshire, came to New Orleans in 1844, and here studied law. He was for many years in the city's public schools, and principal of one which he entered the newspaper business.

He found favor with the Federal authorities who, in 1862, appointed him Treasurer of New Orleans. It was subsequent to all these positions that General Sheridan made him Governor of this State. In 1873 he was appointed him United States Marshal at New Orleans, an office he held for many years.

The General Government certainly valued his services and experiences in the line of money matters, and his reputation in office should prove his capability and uprightiness.

The famous letter from the "reconstruction committee" in Congress, which before the court of inquiry in New Orleans, was traced to Mr. Flanders as its recipient. The letter contained the terrible charge: "to hold the convention at all hazards."

Mr. Flanders was also verbally accused that Congress (reconstruction committee) would legalize the action of the convention "whether its members were legally or illegally elected."

A remarkable fact connected with the investigation of this letter and the fact that Mr. Flanders was summoned to give evidence before the committee, and still more remarkable the fact that a motion was made that his name be stricken from the list of members of the committee.

It was in store for our State, President Johnson, August, 1866, in New Orleans, spoke as follows:

The convention to be called was extinct. Its powers had expired. Its intention was to disfranchise all white men and give the suffrage to all black men, and to overturn the Civil Government established by the United States. It was a revolutionary measure originating in the Radical Congress.

It was as the Executive Department concerned, the effort has been made to restore the Union, to

heal the breach and to pour oil upon the nation's wounds.

"In one department of the government we have seen a constant endeavor to prevent the restoration of peace, harmony and union.

"We have seen hanging upon the verge of the Government, as it were, a body which assumes to be the Congress of the United States, while it is only a Congress of part of the States.

"We have seen this Congress pretend to be for the Union, when its every act tended to perpetuate disunion. We have seen a Congress that seemed to forget that there was a limit to the scope of legislation.

"We have seen Congress gradually encroach upon constitutional rights and violate, day after day, fundamental principles of the Government. In a word we have seen a Congress in minority assume to exercise power which, if consummated, would result in despotism or monarchy itself."

In St. Louis, Sept. 8, 1866, President Johnson said in public:

"If you will take up the riot in New Orleans, you will find that it was substantially planned; when you read the speeches that were made before that convention sat you will find them incendiary in their character, exciting the black population to arm themselves and prepare for the shedding of blood.

"You will also find that convention did assemble in violation of law, and its intention was to supersede the organized authorities in the State of Louisiana; and every man engaged in that convention was a traitor to the Constitution, and hence you find that another rebellion was commenced, having its origin in the Radical Congress. There was the cause and the origin of the blood that was shed, and every drop of that blood is upon their skirts and they are responsible."

Was not Johnson brave when he thus threw his kindly influence over our poor oppressed Southland? When he dared to speak the truth against such men as Thad Stevens, Wendell Phillips and Charles Sumner, who could move the Northern people against him as easily as a child moves its rattle?

The outspoken president who sought to restore the Union by kindness and justice was tried before Congress for acts deserving of impeachment, and one accusation brought against him were the generous words quoted above.

The impeachment trial failed; one vote secured the verdict "not guilty." Nineteen men out of fifty-four obeyed the voice of conscience, and not that of a section of hatred.

It is recorded that Senator Henderson, of Missouri, was instructed by a public meeting in St. Louis to vote "guilty."

His answer was: "As I am an honest man I will vote 'not guilty.'"

The two-third vote for conviction was defeated by that one honest vote, and the United States was saved from being a disgrace to the nations of the world.

A most pathetic incident connected with President Johnson is told by Mrs. C. C. Clay, of Alabama, whose distinguished husband was a senator in Washington at the opening of the war.

Mr. Clay and President Jefferson Davis were confined in separate cells in Fortress Monroe on the charge of being abettors in the murder of President Lincoln. The world knows how false was the charge, but the haters of the South tortured the hearts of that section by the indignities heaped upon these illustrious captives.

Mrs. Clay, in a visit to President Johnson, while pleading for her husband, said:

"Mr. President, I have been told that you have refused to allow the military court, composed of Messrs. Holt, Speed and Stanton, to try Mr. Davis and Mr. Clay."

The president bowed affirmatively. Then all her terror connected with those three men, and all her trust in President Johnson, burst forth in these agonizing words:

"I pray you then to give me your solemn oath, in the presence of Almighty God, that you will never, while in this presidential chair, yield those two innocent men into the hands of that blood-seeking military commission!"

Mr. Johnson, calm and deeply in earnest, answered: "I promise you, Mrs. Clay; trust me!"

And raising his hand repeated solemnly, "Trust me!"

On another occasion this happened as told by Mrs. Clay:

"As I entered the president's room, and before I could speak, he asked: 'Did you meet Stanton as you came in?'"

"I did," I replied, "and he had the audacity to bow to me!"

"The scoundrel!" ejaculated the president. "He has been here an hour clamoring for the blood of Davis and Clay!"

This recital ought to thrill the hearts of every Southerner with reverence for the sorely tried and much maligned President Johnson.

And that promise to Mrs. Clay saved the lives of two men dear to their people and honored by all who knew them.

She writes a few days later these words:

"The radical pressure on the president is fearful. They have expelled Foote and have persuaded Stewart, of Nevada, his son-in-law, to desert his colors and cause—and they may pass the law over the president's manly veto of the civil rights bill. But President Johnson will fall, if fall he must, battling for justice."

These things are related here only to reveal something of President Johnson's character to young readers, and to show how manfully he tried to help the South towards peace and prosperity, when gigantic forces of hate and graft were endeavoring to hurl him from power and branding his name with infamy and lies.

President Johnson was not a man of strong will. He was afraid of Stanton, the Republican Party and "popular clamor."

He admitted that he did not for one instant believe Mr. Davis or Senator Clay had aught to do with the crimes laid against them, but he dared not act according to his belief.

As president he tried to blend reconciliation with reconstruction and found the task beyond his powers. But his heart was true and tender.

General Dick Taylor says: "President Johnson never made a dollar by public office, abstained from quartering a horde of connections on the treasury, refused to uphold rogues in high places, and had too just a conception of the dignity of a chief magistrate to accept presents. It may be said that these are humble qualities for a citizen to boast the possession of by a president of the United States. Yet all whose eyes were not blinded by partisanship, whose manhood was not emasculated by severity, would in these last years

have welcomed the least of them as a manna in the desert."

By "these last years" he refers to other occupants of the White House who followed Mr. Johnson.

The last good word for President Johnson is by Senator S. S. Cox, as follows:

"He stood firm as a rock against all temptations to abuse his own powers, or to exercise those which were not conferred upon him.

"Steadfast and self-reliant in the midst of all difficulty, when dangers threatened, when temptations were strong, he looked only to the constitution of his country and to the people. The constitution of the country is as safe in his hands from violence as it was in the hands of Washington.

"But if, Senators, you condemn him, if you strip him of the robes of his office, if you degrade him to the utmost stretch of your power, mark the prophecy! The strong arms of the people will be about him. They will find a way to raise him from any depths to which you may consign him, and we shall live to see him redeemed and to hear the majestic voice of the people declare: 'Well done, good and faithful servant!'"

This address was made the day the verdict for or against Mr. Johnson's impeachment was to be given. And he was acquitted!

And his crimes were the speaking favorably of the South, denouncing radical and unlawful measures and wishing to displace Mr. Stanton—the blood seeker—from his office as secretary of war.

Never has a man been so vilified and so misunderstood and misrepresented.

May his name and fame grow ever brighter until they shine as stars in the memories of the Southland.