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Introduction

(Part I)

James Baldwin Dorman was a man caught in a maelstrom. The maelstrom was the American Civil War. The coming and the occurrence of the War were actions that hurt Dorman deeply. A man of intellect and curiosity, he believed in the United States. To see it torn asunder was to hurt him deeply. His ideas and beliefs, especially the political ones, were against the grain of the national mood. Whether Dorman chose to deny himself public involvement after the Civil War or whether it was denied him by others we do not know but the fact that he practically retired from public life after the war is there. Dorman had political beliefs that put him into the role of a minority man. Dorman is also an example of a man, like many at that time, who paid a heavy price for the war.

Dorman's early years were promising. James was born to Amanda McCue Dorman and Charles P. Dorman on July 25, 1823 at their home which is now the Episcopal rectory on Lee Avenue in Lexington, Virginia.¹ After his mother died, when James was eight, he was sent to Danville, Virginia, to live with his uncle and aunt. James' father, Charles P. Dorman, was a prominent lawyer and editor of a Lexington paper.² Charles served as an adjutant in the

War of 1812. More importantly, he served thirteen years in the Virginia Assembly and was on the first Board of Visitors of the Virginia Military Institute.

James went to the Virginia Military Institute after attending preparatory school at Washington College until he was the age of sixteen. At V.M.I., he demonstrated the traits of excellence that were to ~~exemplify~~^{characterize} him later.

James proved to be a strong student and orator. Even before he graduated in 1843 at the age of ~~20~~^{Twenty}, James was an Instructor in Modern Languages. He read and quoted Latin with ease. He, also, was able to read fluently some other languages, especially French. After his graduation he went to teach at a private school in Gloucester County.³

Dorman in May of 1845 received a commission as a first lieutenant in the ^{Virginia} 8th Regiment of the infantry of the Virginia Militia. In January of 1846, he along with twenty four other cadets, volunteered for service in the Mexican War. This venture was one highlight in James Dorman's life. This fact is understandable for he was but ~~22~~^{twenty-two} years old at the time and free to meet the world. James' involvement in the Mexican War was but a year and yet it was filled with some of the most interesting events.

After the Mexican War ended, James returned to Lexington

Virginia. James fought hard for a postponement of the inevitable conflict. This did not succeed. War came in April, 1861 and James Dorman saw the country he loved and fought for, split. He, also, saw his beloved state of Virginia bracing for the hard battle that was to come. James joined the ranks of his fellow Virginians because duty called and because of his love for Virginia.⁵ The war, as for most, was not a happy affair. For James it brought great sorrow. Some of his favorite cousins, as well as, closest friends were killed. Desirous of carrying his share of the burden James wanted involvement. He was slow to get the appointment that he wanted. The war, when it ended, left a different United States for James Dorman. It, also, left a changed Lexington and Rockbridge County. He was 42 years old when the war was over, a comparatively young age, but there was much less spark in Dorman now. He still practiced law after the war. He got married in 1872 to a Mrs. Mary L. Newman. Married life for James Dorman brought a great deal of happiness to his life. In 1883 he assumed the position of Clerk of the Court of Appeals in Staunton. He held this position until his death on August 4, 1893.⁶

James Dorman lived seventy years. His years of greatest accomplishment were between 18 and 40. After

that point a decline set in. This is not to say his life in the last 30 years was not happy, but merely states the fact, that either, by choice, or by fate he was not in the public eye as much. James B. Dorman was a capable man, his writings and ideas gave evidence of that. It is unfortunate that he suffered along with his countrymen because of the Reconstruction in the South. To look at Dorman is a look at a complex man. A man who was caught in a difficult situation which required him to reassess his own involvement in society. James Dorman had contemplated and discussed before the war the problem of secession and slavery, unfortunately he had ideas that were never accepted.

~~We~~ ^{I am} are to look into the life of James B. Dorman, primarily his years between 18 and 40. These are the most documented and the liveliest. His life in Rockbridge County, his life as a VMI cadet and instructor, his adventure in the Mexican War, his involvement in state politics in the 1850's, his stand at the Secessionist Convention of Virginia, in 1861, and the sometime, frustrating period as an officer in the Confederate Army, makes James B. Dorman, a man full of experiences and observations. It is in these experiences that hopefully we will get a picture of a truly unique individual with varied observations and different ideas.

Introduction

Virginia 1840 - 1860

(Part 2)

The period before the Civil War was important in James B. Dorman's life. To understand what outside forces affected Dorman we must look at the environment he lived in. Lexington, Virginia, was a commercial, political, cultural, intellectual, social and judicial center for most of the countryside around it.⁷ Washington College was there, and by 1839, Virginia Military Institute was established. The Franklin Society and Company had speeches and debates going on at regular intervals. Also, conservative and puritanical brands of Protestantism existed there despite the existence of several colleges which afforded at different times a highly intellectual atmosphere.⁸

Politically, the area of Lexington and Rockbridge County were considered Whig Territory. It is doubtless true that Dorman's Whig sentiments were, in part, a result of the prevalence of this Whig philosophy. Ironically, Rockbridge County citizens were an exception amidst the small farmers of the Valley most of whom were Democrats. Lexington was a western Virginian town beyond the Blue Ridge Mountains bordering the North River. The Whigs were victorious in

the Rockbridge region during most of the 1830's and 1840's and for Dorman this was a very formative period. His father consistently won re-election to the House of Delegates during the period and again in 1838, Charles P. Dorman, won re-election, as a Whig, along with Alfred Leyburn. The subject of discussion during most of this campaign was the issue of a national bank versus a Subtreasury system. Discussion of this topic and many others were common among the informed people in Lexington.⁹

The year of 1837 had been a politically important year for the U. S. Andrew Jackson, a strong President of the Democratic Party, had been succeeded by Martin Van Buren who did not wield power with the same success. Van Buren's administration was fatally handicapped by a severe depression, a result of the Panic of 1837. The Whigs took advantage of the Democratic problems and nominated for President a military war hero named William Henry Harrison.¹⁰ The campaign between Harrison and Van Buren was bitter but Harrison emerged as the victor in 1840. Again, Charles Dorman was re-elected to the House of Delegates. Then in Virginia great confusion came with the death of William Henry Harrison. John Tyler moved into the Presidency but with much challenge to his power by the Congress. Nationalist Whigs began to fight with State Rights Whigs which hurt the Whig Party in Virginia.

Tyler could not hold the eastern Virginian states rights Whigs together and in the western part of Virginia the nationalistic Whigs began to defect.¹¹ In 1842, the Democrats gained control of the state legislature ending the Whig control of four years.

By 1843, Lexington's population was 1200. Lexingtonians were hostile to eastern Virginians for there had grown up a pronounced hostility between eastern and western Virginia. Conflict over power had existed between these two areas for years. Conflict rose out of the ability of the eastern minority to retain control of the legislative branch despite a growth in the population of the counties in Western Virginia. The 1840's were to see the east-west friction at a peak. The Blue Ridge Mountains were the dividing line. The people in the West were for a free public school system but the easterners of Virginia wanted only private education and stronger support for the University of Virginia.¹² The West wanted internal improvements but the East saw little need for such expense. However, the most important issue of conflict and division was slavery. By 1840, 87 per cent of the states' slaves lived east of the Blue Ridge Mountains while 55 per cent of the whites lived west of the mountains. This imbalance spoke of varied economic concerns. The west was made up largely of farmers and mechanics and the east of large-scale

plantations. Conflict was so great in the mid 1840's that separation of the state along east-west lines was threatened. ~~Uniquely~~, the Democrats and Whigs of western Virginia (including Lexington) were joined in the drive for an equitable legislative system. More agitation developed with the legislative delays when they wanted funds for a canal up the James River from Lynchburg past the mouth of the North River to Buchanan.¹³

Always the slavery issue was important and discussions of possible abolition of it west of mountains were heard throughout the Rockbridge area. Natives of the Tidewater area in Rockbridge were, not surprisingly, against any form of abolition. Others advocated gradual emancipation and a possible division of the state. Importantly, the fact of colonization of the Negro was brought up. This was a cause that James B. Dorman was to champion for a while. This idea was advocated, by many, who saw that the answer to the problem was to rid Virginia of the Negro, thereby eliminating slavery.¹⁴

The political complexities of Virginia and the U. S. were multiplying in the 1850's. Moderation was on the wane and passion was on the rise. Virginia was experiencing more sectional strife. Wise's group had a look of radicalism and Hunter's was enveloped in eloquence and steadfast conservatism.¹⁵ In May 1854, Henry Wise and R. M. T. Hunter were

leaders of factions both championing Southern rights but
by different methods.¹⁶ In May, 1854 Henry Wise won the
governorship although he failed to carry Rockbridge County,
the sentiments of Rockbridge did not coincide with many of
those in the state. But, in 1858, a man from Lexington
was elected to the Governorship. The man, John Letcher,
a congressman and long-time leader in the Rockbridge area,
was a moderate, and he won over the Whig's opposition.

The situation in Letcher's first years of governorship
aptly described the situation across the U. S. There was
no harmony just factionalism. Letcher blamed the North for
the current problems. John Brown's Raid at Harper's Ferry
ignited fires of conflict. However, incentive for a con-
flict was resisted by Virginians whether from the North or
even the South. Two commissioners from Mississippi came to
see John Letcher with a proposal of a southern convention.
This idea was rejected by Letcher and by the Virginia legis-
lature. Democratic disunity on the national level was un-
fortunate. Though, the Whig party was unable to be unified
on a national scale, the disunity of the Democrats brought
the Southern Whigs and some southern Democrats closer.¹⁷

For the Rockbridge area its Whiggish tendencies were
out of place and out of line. The new Republican Party
drew Northern Whigs away from the Party. What was left of

the Whigs was picked up by the Know-Nothing Party which experienced a short life. The South was moving farther and farther away from the Union. This left people who believed in principles of the Southern way yet devoted to the Union, out in the cold. James Dorman was a Whig from his early days, he too was to experience this separation. The Whigs in Virginia were never a definiable entity. Lines of conflict and interest changed so much that the shallowness of the Whig Party's principles were revealed. An inability to accurately ascertain the political situation and the stand to take made the Whig Party decline. Unfortunately for the U. S., Virginia, and Dorman, this fact lessened the chances for moderation which led to the painful Civil War.¹⁸

Chapter I - Footnotes

¹Charles W. Turner, "James B. Dorman's Civil War Letters", (Unpublished Article) p. 1.

²Owen O. Norton, History of Rockbridge County, p. 249.

³Turner, "James B. Dorman's Civil War Letters", (Unpublished Article), p. 2.

⁴Lexington Gazette, August 10, 1893, p. 3.

⁵Norton, History of Rockbridge County, p. 120.

⁶Lexington Gazette, August 10, 1893, p. 3.

⁷F. N. Boney, John Letcher of Virginia, p. 14.

⁸Ibid., p. 14.

⁹Ibid., p. 22.

¹⁰Ibid., p. 24.

¹¹Ibid., p. 29.

¹²Ibid., p. 36.

¹³Ibid., p. 37.

¹⁴Ibid., p. 38.

¹⁵Ibid., p. 60.

¹⁶Ibid., p. 60.

¹⁷Ibid., p. 98.

¹⁸Ibid., p. 98.

Chapter II

Dorman's Philosophy

James B. Dorman started a diary in late 1841. It was started while he was at the Virginia Military Institute, when he was only 18 years old. It reveals qualities in Dorman that were to show up again and again. Dorman was young but curious for knowledge and the thirst was constantly being fed through books and other experiences.

James started the diary for several reasons. One was to improve his style of handwriting which he believed to have deteriorated since he came to the Institute. A more important reason was the desire to keep a record of his youth which he could review in his later life and derive, what he called, "a useful lesson from the errors or crimes committed."¹ Thoughts on any subject that came to mind were, also, recorded.

James was struck with tragedy in his early years. His mother died when he was only eight years old. James, soon became accustomed, after this unfortunate event, with traveling back and forth from Lexington to Danville. While in Danville, James lived with his Aunt Julia Campbell. At the age of 12, James entered Washington College Preparatory Department in 1835, and studied there for four years. At

Washington College he had completed courses in Mathematics, Philosophy, Ethics, Chemistry and the Latin language so he had college work too. James entered the newly formed Virginia Military Institute. James' early years at VMI showed his academic abilities. In June 1841 his standing in his class was exceptional. In Mathematics, French and Declamation he was first. In composition he was second. His intellectual abilities were recognized when he was appointed instructor of Modern Languages on September 2, 1841.²

James was to become a Professor of Modern Languages at the age of eighteen. Responsibility was thrust on him quickly. Meanwhile, his relatives were scattered all over. His father was a member of the House of Delegates and lived part time in Richmond. James' brother Charles was going to school to James S. Paxton six miles out of Lexington. His sister was at his Grandfather McCue's place in Augusta County. His Grandfather Dorman was boarding with his daughter, Mrs. J. D. Davidson. His Aunt Julia had moved from Danville to Texas with her two children partially a result of the suicide of her husband in January 1841.³

One of James' first impressions recorded came at a meeting in Lexington, when an important Southern leader spoke, William C. Preston of South Carolina. Preston spoke in such a manner that James said "that never have I seen such

eloquence, wisdom and vivacity conformed."⁴ James wrote down several of Preston's remarks. A typical one was "not love or lust or wine but knowledge, literature and poetry,"⁵ is needed for a full life.

James was at an age to be romantic and he writes of some of his love affairs. One such story dealt with the society of Richmond and "a dark-eyed lady". Then, James spoke of holding her hand and whispering into her ear and that she listened to it tremblingly yet delightedly.⁶ He was in love but it was not mutual. James realized she ~~did~~ not love him and, with that, the affair ended. As most experiences at that age they were short and superficial, he like any student, devoted himself to his studies.⁷

On love he possessed some very strong feelings. James felt that if the wife was a first love then the man had a right to feel "doubly happy." He said, "First love and love at first sight are articles of my creed."⁸

The June examinations in 1842 proved Dorman's abilities again. In French and German and in overall general merit he was first. This particular period revealed James' great thirst for knowledge. A questioning thought was persistent, what was use of all this?

In September, of 1842, the third anniversary of VMI was celebrated and James felt that Virginia should be

proud of her progress.

James graduated from VMI in June 1843. He was second in his class.⁹ He was twenty years old and just about to enter into the world to earn his living. His interests were broad. Literature, drama, religion, economics and most especially politics, interested him.

After graduation James became a tutor in Gloucester County, Virginia. There, James was to witness affairs, discussions and entertainment that he had never heard or seen before. His mind and intellect were to be challenged and he, in turn, challenged all those present.

On November 9, 1843 a sharp discussion on slavery was recorded, by James in his diary. His employer, Mr. Maxwell Clarke spoke to James of the great unprofitability of slaves and the many problems they created. James wondered if slavery was such a ^{strain} ~~drag~~ on the pocketbook, ~~if so~~ why didn't the slaveowners just liberate them? Clarke told Dorman that thefts by the slaves were a daily occurrence. He told James that he had lost 45 of 105 pigs that year. He, also, told him of a neighbor John Tabb who through calculation proved a Negro woman could raise and spin enough cotton worth \$5.50 per annum but that all the expenses incurred would come to \$20.00 per annum. To these remarks Dorman said why does any man fear to free his slaves? He concluded:

It is a puerile dread of regretting the step after it has been irrevocably taken that restrains them from obeying the dictates of their reason and their feeling of natural justice and right.¹⁰

For Gloucester and its people the presence of slavery was an issue continually talked about. Mr. Clarke spoke of an unfortunate event. He had sold one of his Negro servants, who had been pilfering wine and liquor from the wine cellar. This servant had stolen 30 gallons of wine since Christmas and probably 5 to 6 dozen gallons of port wine and a half gallon of another wine. The disposal of the slave was not a happy affair but was considered necessary and proper.¹¹

The economy in this area was gradually improving. Cotton, according to James, had advanced in prices bringing an estimated \$10,000,000 in the last year. Actually the prices of Negroes rose in the three weeks of February from 450 to 700 dollars alone. The rise in prices in slaves brought big profit for the cotton producers in the South and promised more wealth to all slaveowners.¹²

The brain of Dorman was busy with other provocative questions and answers. Also his mind was open to every subject. He read many books. He read in the newspaper, "Albion", a piece freeing Napoleon from any guilt in the execution of the Duke d'Enghien. He conversed with Miss

Ellen Clarke about the positives and negatives of the French, Italian, and German languages. Other topics discussed were on Chinese women, Siamese twins, and Tom Thumb, the dwarf. On one night theatres were the subjects of conversation. Discussions of the great actors of the day, such as David Garrick and Edwin Booth, were engaged in. The parts of the characters Lear, Richard, Hamlet, Macbeth, Spartacus, Pizarro, and Virginius were retold. One funny story about David Garrick was told by Mr. Clarke. In the midst of the tent scene in Richard III Garrick, who had been showing horror on his face, burst into laughter. A butcher had come into the pit bringing along his dog and with the weather being warm took off his wig and placed it on the dog. Garrick had finished his part and had fallen on the floor when he looked up and saw the dog looking straight up at him with the wig on.¹³

Hamlet was one play which James remarked widely about. Mr. Clarke had finished reading the play. James regarded the play "a wonderful production of a mastermind," yet he also felt that the play "abounded with errors, absurdities and anachronisms of the grossest character."¹⁴ Without a doubt, James Dorman had levied some very strong indictments against Shakespeare. The mark of a strong, somewhat arrogant mind is shown. The meaning of his opinions are best conveyed through his own words:

He places words and sentiments unrivaled in their beauty and oracular in their wisdom, in the mouth of a man who afterwards is exhibited as a pompous, self-sufficient, silly sycophantish personage, whom we should suppose to be the very last to give such advice.¹⁵

The play represented the situation to Dorman of a mighty task imposed upon a mind, which is unable to handle the problems and calamities involved. Dorman believed that Shakespeare intended to present a person forced to desperation by his wrongs, yet, lacking the moral energy to prompt revenge. The mad^eness of Hamlet is seen by James as a concealment for the real distraction within the mind. In a final comment by James, Shakespeare is viewed as an author "great in his faults but immeasurably greater in his excellencies."¹⁶

The Koran was an item discussed by Dorman in his diary. An interesting story from The Koran was recalled dealing with honesty and stealing. Dorman, through this story, reached a conclusion that the story in The Koran taught the people "to believe that he who steals from another in this world will be compelled to repay the latter fourfold in that world."¹⁷ Dorman felt that The Koran was interesting and even though the Turks were too little known to us, our lack of knowledge of them should be made up by reading The Koran.

The Christmas season of 1843 for James B. Dorman brought self analysis into his diary. Dorman lamented his inadequacies in composition and delivery but the words he states betray his talents. One comment was:

and if anyone will set me upon a plan of getting rid of that extra portion of slothfulness with which I am encumbered, I will regard him with a greater reverence, a more humble devotion than the fire-worshippers paid to the sun.¹⁸

The Christmas season brought a comment from James on Christianity. James saw that the Americans are compelled to be Christians by sheer necessity, "to disbelieve God is to disbelieve in one's own existence."¹⁹

Christmas Day in Gloucester brought interesting observations from James. There was a great deal of mirth and jollity but nothing according to other sources, that equaled previous Christmases. James was told that thirty to forty persons would sit down together at a dinner party and the wine there alone would cost fifty dollars. From this type of entertainment it was said "that two generations had eaten themselves out of house and home in Gloucester and a third was doing it now." In Gloucester the depressed price of agricultural produce put a widespread check on the great extravagance. Another scene that brought interest to Dorman was the giving between the slaves and master. The

slaves were given a quarter of a dollar each and something from the store room. The slaves in return sang songs in thanksgiving to the master. Dorman here saw a lesson for both the Northern abolitionist and the southern planter. The abolitionist would learn of "the absurdity of his mad and ruinous schemes and the southern planter would see the need to sometimes give to those who were entrusted to his keeping."²⁰

The beginning of 1844 saw the departure of Miss Ellen Clarke, whom Dorman liked. Dorman lamented at her leaving. He referred to her as a fascinating damsel and if he only had "a few more years, a little more money, and a little more wit" he might have tried to marry her. The metaphorical style of James comes flowing in his personal commentary. He states, "I might be foolish enough (in retrospect) to scorch my wings in the bright flame of her charms". James' mind and heart were open to all influences.²¹

On January 15, 1844 James discussed the conditions of parts of Latin America with Mr. Jack Bryan a neighbor of the Clarkes. On Cuba, James felt that it should remain under the control of Spain. Havana was regarded as one of the finest cities in the Americas while Barbadoes had land which sold for 300 English pounds an acre and produced some of the finest sugar. Some of the richest families in England

supposedly owned property there. Finally, Santa Domingo was a country which secured its freedom by means of the French revolution and Brazil was the greatest sugar-producing country in the world. Peru had a delightful climate.²²

In another discussion with Mr. Bryan the subject of universal suffrage came up. James Dorman stood uniformly opposed to it. James states, "I have no idea of giving power to those who are restrained by no considerations of either duty or interest."²³ More specifically James dealt a scathing blow to ~~frontier~~ western man. ~~Western~~ Frontier man was interested in maintaining a balance of power in his hands. This action would create mobocracy, according to Dorman. The consequences could lead to deplorable conditions as those evidenced in even New York.²⁴

In January of 1844 Dorman read the biography of Richard Sheridan written by a man named Moore. James, after reading the book, felt he knew the character of Sheridan much better. Moore attempted, according to James, to conceal the defects of Sheridan but as Dorman states, "(the cloak thrown over his vices only adds to the apparent size of the mass (of vices))."²⁵ Through the biography Dorman saw a resemblance between Richard Sheridan and Robert Burns, the Scottish poet.

James' interests were not totally within the realm of discourse and study. He enjoyed skating, hunting and canoeing.

He enjoyed also the numerous dinner parties that were held in Gloucester County. On one excursion with three sons of Mr. Clarke he encountered a German pedlar. The pedlar was a German Jew named Reese. Reese at "Warner Hall," one of the plantations in Gloucester, presented his various wares to the people there. Bartering from 5 to 12 o'clock went on. The Clarkes bought a gold watch, knives and a gold pencil. James bought a gold pencil, a pistol, a knife, razors, soap and steel pans. All of these items cost him \$10. The pedlar, during his trade, talked of himself and of slavery in America. He said the Negroes in America had it better than the common farmers in Germany. The pedlar claimed he had worked in a tanyard at 40 cents a week with the only meat available, to him, obtainable from the horns and hides he got. The presence of the pedlar was an interesting experience for all the people present, both young and old.²⁶

James Dorman's reading continued on into the topics of history, politics,^{and} literature, ~~etc.~~ In the middle of March 1844 James finished the first volume of David Hussey's History. This volume brought reflections and criticism upon the work. James found the book offensive to his Whig beliefs. The criticisms were several, such as, a gross misrepresentation of the early history of the English Church, injustices ~~given~~ credited to the barons of older times, and an effort to show

the changes before the time of the Stuarts. James, doubtless, felt any disparaging remarks towards the Stuarts should be overlooked.²⁷

On March 18th¹⁸⁴⁴ James received two letters from his native Lexington both bearing sad news. An old friend, Cabell Reid, had died. James mourned his loss but praised the fact that when he died he was a Christian. This fact, James believed, sent his friend on to a far higher and richer abode.²⁸

While reading Caesar, Virgil and other works continued, James finished reading Cunningham's History of Literature. The author was complimented and criticized at the same time. It seems the book possessed political comments under the disguise of literature. This he condemned.²⁹

In the middle of March, James went to hear a Baptist minister. The minister, a Colonel Allen, requested permission to use the Episcopal Church where a large crowd was expected. The vestry of the Abingdon Church granted permission with pleasure. James saw good in the action but he possessed an unknown fear of the ramifications of the permission. James wrote, "I hope and I fear." Why he was afraid is unknown but the possibility of a hidden dislike for the Baptists is not at all unlikely.³⁰

In April, 1844 James traveled to Richmond and Norfolk. The trip was eventful and illuminating. James accompanied

Mrs. Clarke to Norfolk for the purpose of picking up her three sons there. They reached Yorktown by ferry-boat the day they left Gloucester. Yorktown was not impressive to James, who described it as desolate. Unfortunately, James was unable to see the ruins of the battle of Yorktown up close but from a distance, in a carriage, he saw the remains of several fortifications. A cave was also seen which supposedly was where General Cornwallis, the British Commander, had been sheltered.³¹

The James River was a sight that brought comment from James Dorman. The width of the river was described as three to four miles ~~long~~ ^{wide}. James marveled at this because he was unaccustomed to see such a large river, especially in comparison to the ones seen in Western Virginia. Beside the James, Dorman spent time picking up shells which he regarded as beautiful fossil specimens.³²

The ~~E~~ Express Steamer arrived to pick up James and Mrs. Clarke. The presence of this boat was new to the Virginia waterways. James saw nothing but good in its presence. The older boats had monopolized the travel and charged exorbitant prices. The steamer would change the travel as well as the fare dramatically.³³

Traveling the James River was interesting to him. He stayed on the upper deck of the steamer at all times occupying

himself, with reading Thomas Jefferson's Notes on Virginia and observing the palatial estates that were built alongside the river. The old family mansions at "Wyanoke", "Westover", "Brandon", and "Shirley" were seen. One house on the north bank of the river in Charles City County was where William Henry Harrison was born. When he reached Richmond, James bought clothes, attended speeches by several orators, saw friends, and went to church. Traveling back down to Norfolk, where he saw a fellow cadet, Joe Smith, who was a clerk on a large military vessel. The trip was fun for James and revealed more sights of the world to him.³⁴

The return to Gloucester spurred James on to more reading. He read Madame Gillis' Tales of the Castle and a book entitled Conversations on Nature and Art. Other books James planned to read were Miss Waddie's Rome in the Nineteenth Century, Maxwell's Historical and Posthumous Memoirs of his own time, Robertson's Charles V and History of America and finally to continue reading the classics such as Virgil, Horace, Tacitus, etc.³⁵

James, during the month of April, had his first illness in years. ~~Distemper~~ ^{Fever} troubles and pain in his chest compelled James to have himself bled for the first time in his life. The morning afterward he took some Epsom salts which made him feel better. The illness was considered beneficial by James

because it put good health in a different perspective. Good health was definitely something to be thankful for.³⁶

An experience that James was to see and enjoy over and over again, in Gloucester, was the dinner party. Parties were not the exception, but the rule, for the gentry life in Gloucester County. At a party at one plantation, "White Marsh", James enjoyed festivities with fervor. Dancing went on until 2 o'clock in the morning. The only interruptions in the dancing were a display of fireworks at 11 o'clock and supper served at 12:30. The activities were of the highest form. James said, "Everything gave evidence of wealth and fashion." All the elegance was enjoyable to James but this form of life was something he did not want to practice forever. The life of leisure was all around him but it did not hold to disciplines James was practicing.³⁷

In the month of July 1844 James reached the age of 21. This point was, to James, the mark of becoming a man. In looking at himself James was despairing of his own existence. He felt he had done nothing for which he could truly be proud of. Virtue and knowledge were the only things regarded by James as being worthwhile. James remarked, "To be and not to seem." This was to be his motto.³⁸

On July 4, 1844 James met a Mrs. Bryan, a cousin of the famous John Randolph of Roanoke. Mrs. Bryan was described as

full of wit and possessing tremendous philosophical and practical knowledge. With Mrs. Bryan, James agreed that the three books of greatest preference were The Bible, Shakespeare plays and ^{William} Couper poetry. One day in July, James went to a plantation called "Rosewell". This plantation was beautiful and noteworthy to James. The mansion at Rosewell was described as a tall structure which arose from the surrounding plain with "an air of solitary grandeur." The mansion had been built by materials which had been brought from England more than a century ago. The plantation had been maintained because, as James said, "its successive owners were wealthy and aristocratic." The surroundings reflected the unique life of the Virginia gentry.³⁹

In the middle of July James left for the North. He expected to spend a great deal of his trip in New York State. The trip was from July 26 to August 10. James calculated the cost of the trip at \$240; \$100 for traveling and \$140 in clothes and books.⁴⁰

The beginning of the trip was marked by the interesting sight of a Kansas Indian in Norfolk. The Indian was delighted to see the "big water". He was dressed in elegant finery and painted for the occasion. James described him as "large in person, possessing very black eyes, a majestic air, and a stately carriage."⁴¹

On July 28th James saw New York City. He went to the Astor House and then to Brooklyn. In Brooklyn James enjoyed many sights. He went into many book stores. The Trinity Church was considered by James as a structure unparalleled in the Union. James, also, visited the Harper and Brothers Publishing House. After seeing New York City, James travelled up the Hudson River. From Albany James went to the Niagara Falls and then home. After the trip, James returned to Lexington and there a new life was to begin. The Gloucester life for James had been valuable, there he had enjoyed the political discussion particularly.⁴²

To politics we will now turn.

Chapter II - Footnotes

¹James B. Dorman, "Diary of James B. Dorman, 1841-1848", (Unpublished Document), p. 1.

²Ibid., p. 3.

³Ibid., p. 3.

⁴Ibid., p. 4.

⁵Ibid., p. 5.

⁶Ibid., p. 6.

⁷Ibid., p. 7.

⁸Ibid., p. 7.

⁹Raymond E. Dixon, ed., Register of Former Cadets-VMI, p. 8.

¹⁰Dorman, "Diary of James B. Dorman, 1841-1848", (Unpublished Document), p. 11.

¹¹Ibid., p. 49.

¹²~~Ibid., p. 52.
G. B. Phillips, Life and Labor in the Old South, p. 52.~~

¹³Dorman, "Diary of James B. Dorman, 1841-1848", (Unpublished Document), p. 15.

¹⁴Ibid., p. 20.

¹⁵Ibid., p. 20.

¹⁶Ibid., p. 20.

¹⁷Ibid., p. 19.

¹⁸Ibid., p. 26.

¹⁹Ibid., p. 27.

²⁰Ibid., p. 27.

31 Ibid., p. 63-64.

32 Ibid., p. 65.

33 Ibid., p. 65.

34 Ibid., p. 67, 69.

35 Ibid., p. 74.

36 Ibid., p. 75.

37 Ibid., p. 92, 94.

38 Ibid., p. 101.

39 Ibid., p. 107.

40 Ibid., p. 108.

41 Ibid., p. 111.

42 Ibid., p. 113-114.

Chapter III

A Political Observer in Gloucester

The years in Gloucester were filled with many things for James. His mind wandered through various disciplines. The subject of greatest interest was politics. Politics, and the debates that resulted from it, fascinated James. As mentioned in the previous chapter, his mind searched to find out about many things. Politics was a subject that was the most fascinating. James tells us that constantly politics and farming were the topics most talked about in Gloucester.¹ The controversy of slavery was present in many discussions. The complexities of the Tariff were also subject to scrutiny. Probably, the greatest area of concentration in the political discussions was the competition between the political parties. All types of issues were discussed and who had political control. The interesting point about this is that it reflected the general naivete among many of the political leaders towards the impending crisis. These discussions of early 1840's showed a desire to sweep the problem of slavery under the rug. North and South were in opposition but the prospect of war was still far away.

One of the first political discussions recorded by James dealt with John Tyler. Mr. Clarke was discussing

with James, the ramifications of John Tyler's actions, in dealing with the bank bill. James and Mr. Clarke, both agreed, that John Tyler had given up a good opportunity to gain re-election in 1844. Both proposed that if Tyler had left the Sub-Treasury system intact and vetoed the bank bill, both sides, would have been pleased and not antagonistic to Tyler's re-election. As a result Tyler's chances, at this point, in time (November 1843) were slim.²

The tariff question was a topic for many discussions. Mr. Clarke told James he should be a nullifier and an anti-tariff man. The idea of nullification was not totally repugnant to James, who saw it as a milder remedy than secession. The idea of a high protective tariff was regarded as inexpedient and unjust. However, James subscribed to the Whig doctrine of a revenue tariff which in his eyes would be to the best interests of the U. S..³

The tariff was important to many of the planters in the South, as well as, other people across the country. James saw its importance and ~~divisiveness~~^{controversiality}. In the presidential election of 1844 the tariff was a big issue according to James. Most politicians were "fishy", on the subject, because it was so controversial. James saw the people of Gloucester County equally divided on the matter even with a Whig majority. The presence of the election and the tariff

controversy caught the attention of James and gave promise of the excitement to come.⁴

The protective tariff was finally seen by James as reasonable and satisfactory, it was a "necessary and politic measure" to be fairly adjusted by the Congress. South Carolina, on the Protective Tariff, would probably nullify it and go to arms which James saw, as being, unlawful. Interestingly, James saw a change in public opinion from 1832 to 1844. In 1832 nullification was supported by many men, in the South, but by 1844, this had changed. The reason is based upon the skills of Henry Clay as a compromiser. Clay's compromise bill was regarded by James as masterful. A positive result seen by James was in the change of attitude of General James Hamilton. Hamilton in 1832 was the leader of a company of volunteers in Charleston, South Carolina, soon after the Proclamation of the Force Bill. Hamilton, now, was a great friend of Henry Clay, with little desire to leave the union. Finally, Virginia, in 1844 was generally opposed to the idea of nullification and ^{opposed} ~~favored~~ a higher tariff.⁵

The election in 1844 was exciting to James. This was his first election, after his interest, in politics had been stirred. Politics and the party intricacies were challenging to the mind of James B. Dorman. More importantly,

James was taking an interest in the politics of his father. At the age of 21, James was forming opinions and respectful of those of the masters of politics. The political leader which captured his mind the most was the compromiser, Henry Clay. James B. Dorman wanted Clay elected President of the United States. Actually, Clay represented James' philosophies and ideals the best.

On March 4, 1844 James expressed the hope that Clay would be elected president. In his diary the political situation was assessed by James as promising. Maryland had elected a Whig Congressman and appeared solidly for Clay. Georgia was moving into the Whig columns. James saw reason to write that "Clay's prospects were good."⁶

During the campaigns James studied the platform of other candidates than Clay. The local debates were analyzed and assessed. One particular debate over a seat in the U. S. House of Representatives was witnessed. The Congressional district for the seat was made up of ten counties: Accomac, Northhampton (North Shore), Elizabeth City, Warwick, James City, York, Gloucester, Matthews, Middlesex, and Charles City. The two candidates debating were Hill Carter of Shirley, a Whig, and a Judge Bayly, a Democrat. In James' opinion, Carter labored under disadvantage for Bayly was a judge and a very popular one.

Despite this James hoped the debate would prove Carter the better man. Carter talked for two hours. He drew a parallel between Martin Van Buren and Henry Clay with regard to the Hope case.⁷ Carter, also, talked about the tariff and the prospects of a National Bank and the Sub-Treasury system. Judge Bayly's reply to Carter's speech was regarded as of better quality by James. Bayly, too, spoke equally long. He favored the veto of the bank bill, the annexation of Texas, and a low tariff. James saw Bayly's arguments as sound. On the veto question his reasoning was seen as strong and forcible. On the statehood of Texas the argument was just and proper. On the tariff his remarks were ingenious, plausible and quite adequate for those who agreed to the premise. James was disheartened a little by the performance of Carter which he saw as a bit too impassionate for the listeners. Overall, James hoped to see a better performance by other Whig candidates.⁸

Perhaps the biggest experience for James in Gloucester County was his meeting with Henry Clay. John Tabb invited James to "White Marsh", his home, to meet Henry Clay. James remarked, "I have not been so elated at any piece of news for years."⁹ James had planned to see Clay in Norfolk but he had to forget that because of previous engagements. The prospect of seeing Henry Clay in a much more relaxed situation was

almost too good. James rode to "White Marsh" with Mr. Clarke and Mr. Bryan. When they reached "White Marsh" Clay had arrived there just a few moments earlier. The first sight of Clay for James was a disappointing one. James remarks, "He was walking up and down the portico with his hands crossed behind him, in a rather slovenly manner with none of that dignity that I expected to see."¹⁰ Despite the first impression, James was understanding when Clay said he had been meeting crowds at every village, hamlet and crossroad since leaving Norfolk. Clay spoke to people at Charleston, Raleigh, Petersburg and Norfolk and he had come to Gloucester to rest. James wrote "He needed rest." James was not disappointed in Clay in the end. James saw a difference in Clay resting and Clay speaking. The physical features of Clay were studied by James. When Clay spoke, his face lit up. The shape of his head and deep set eyes were interesting to James. His manner of talking to people led James to judge him, a bold, frank, fearless man who possessed a great deal of confidence. In Clay, James saw the politician as well as the legislator. Clay had great talents and virtues but there was the possibility, also, of great vices. Clay was a man whom James believed not to be perfect but the best choice for President of the United States.¹¹

April 25, 1844 was the local election day in Virginia. The results of that election were pleasant to James. The Whigs did well. In Gloucester, the Whig majority was decisive. Despite this, the election in this area led James to conclude that the party lines were not drawn clearly. The people of Gloucester were States Rights, in principle, so whichever party came closest to the desired principle received the peoples' vote.¹² The results were often, as expected, mixed.

The national election for President turned out to be a big disappointment for James. He expected and hoped that Clay would be elected President. The victory for James K. Polk brought astonishment to James. James said, "Polk is our president and gloom rests upon the present and the future."¹³ His life was now, truly, beginning to take a serious turn.

Politics were interesting to James then and the excitement of it was present, even, in Gloucester County. The time spent there was helpful too. James was growing to maturity in his thinking. From this time on he resolved to become a lawyer and take an active part in the game of politics.

Chapter III - Footnotes

¹James B. Dorman, "Diary of James B. Dorman, 1841-1848", (Unpublished Document), p. 48.

²Ibid., p. 17.

³Ibid., p. 25.

⁴Ibid., p. 47.

⁵Ibid., p. 72.

⁶Ibid., p. 51.

⁷Ibid., p. 60; The Hope case is presumed to be a local controversy in Gloucester County.

⁸Ibid., p. 71.

⁹Ibid., p. 80.

¹⁰Ibid., p. 81.

¹¹Ibid., p. 82.

¹²Ibid., p. 84.

¹³Ibid., p. 117.

Chapter IV

Lawyer and Soldier

The decision to become a lawyer occurred over the summer of 1844 in Lexington. It was to take James a full year of studying and examination to get his law license. The month of September marked the beginning of his studies in law. James decided to devote four hours of each day to law along with two to history and one to poetry. In June 1844 James had a discussion with Judge Beverly Tucker on law. Judge Tucker told James that the best school for training lawyers was in the West especially the law school of the University of Missouri. Judge Tucker also pointed out the merits of reading Blackstone's Commentaries especially the second volume and, in fact, he recommended reading it before attending any law school.¹

In the first week of September James read the first division of Blackstone's Commentaries. This consisted primarily of the study of law, in general, and specifically the laws of England and countries using their laws. At the end of September James finished Blackstone's chapter on the Parliament. In November the disappointment of Clay's defeat moved James to immerse himself more into law. After attending a wedding at that time James wrote, "When I return

Law must have the entire possession of my mind (if Love does not slip in the while)"². In December 1844 James finished the first book of Blackstone's Commentaries and, by the beginning, of January James had finished the second book of the same.³

The spring of 1845 was spent in reading many other law books and watching various court cases. The Circuit Court was in session in May and two cases were witnessed by James. One case dealt with perjury and the other with stealing. The persons accused of perjury were acquitted. The second case resulted in a "hung" jury. The defendant was counseled by James' father, C. P. Dorman and a well-known lawyer, A.H.H. Stuart of Staunton.⁴

The June session of the court was occupied with criminal cases. The abundance of such cases in court led James to remark that the area was probably a rendezvous for all petty "corn rogues" and pilferers. One trial dealt with a man caught in a bear-trap while trying to steal corn.⁵ By this time James was studying to get a license to practice law from the Judges of the Court of Appeals sitting at Lewisburg. James' confidence of success was undermined because he felt he had failed to truly prepare during the previous ten months. However, James decided an attempt must be made. James wrote that the attempt was a bold, perhaps chimerical one, but

necessity compelled it be done.⁶

A resumption of James' diary in September told of James' success in the practice of law. On September 22, 1845 James wrote that he succeeded in obtaining a law license and that he had entered into partnership with his father. He was occupied with the law now and trials were witnessed daily by James. In one session of the Circuit Court cases involved Negro-stealing and another of stealing some horse collars. James took his first law case in November. He was retained as counsel on a suit dealing with an unfair horse trade.⁷ James however pursued for the most part a quiet life in his legal career for he had his mind on other things, mainly the dream of a journey to Texas.⁸

Texas had been a controversial issue for years. The United States wanted Texas but without incurring a war. In 1843, Tyler pushed the issue of statehood for Texas hard. He did not succeed at first but the result of his actions made the statehood issue a primary one in the Presidential election of 1844. Polk's election assured the statehood of Texas and on March 2, 1845, by the executive action of John Tyler the state was added. Texas' statehood greatly offended Mexico and the possibility of war seemed quite probable. To James B. Dorman, Texas and the possible war looked

exciting and adventuresome. James' Aunt Julia Campbell, who had taken care of him in his youth, possessed a great deal of land in Texas. The amount was several thousand acres near the Red River. James also possessed a few acres there, given him by his aunt and he wished to see them.⁹

The effect of annexation would enhance James and his aunt's property. James, however, advanced the observation that annexation would hurt Virginia if war should come. James wrote, "She (Virginia) will lose a large body of her most vigorous population and a great part of her wealth."¹⁰ In addition to this, James had some fear of war with England over Texas. This action, however, was considered highly unlikely. James wanted to go to Texas but he questioned the reason for it. Texas was inviting with what James called its extensive forests, luxuriant vegetation, and tropical fruits, but James also wondered why he shouldn't be contented to stay in Virginia which possessed the conveniences and comforts of established society. The best answer to this lies in the curiosity and impetuosity of youth.¹¹

In October, 1845 James wrote a letter to his Aunt Julia which reaffirmed his determination to visit Texas.¹² By December James determined to go to Texas. Plans were being made to start with Gardner Paxton by the end of December.

James' adventure to Texas was to begin, then.

James left Lexington, Virginia on January 12, 1846 with the intention of visiting Texas and his aunt. Military involvement was a possibility but his writings detect no such original intention. James spent several months in Harrison and San Augustine Counties, Texas. In the middle of May news came that General Zachary Taylor had been met by a larger Mexican force and he needed volunteers. This call was responded to quickly by James. A company was formed and on May 23rd a flag was presented to the company by the local ladies to whom James gave thanks in behalf of the company. Arms and horses were supplied by the local people in an earnest effort to help the war cause. James and a friend A. S. "Lex" Field, were given the job to present the roll of volunteers in Austin. This responsibility was welcomed by James. James enjoyed the group of individuals, in his company, and considered many of them his good friends. James wrote that when the Texans "took 'a liking' to a certain person they were the finest friends in the world."¹³ With regard to the war, James felt a duty to protect General Taylor from the Mexicans but questioned the purpose in invading a foreign territory. However, for James the war provided interesting experiences and fulfilled many of his own desires for adventure.¹⁴

His trip to Austin, Texas is described in detail by James as a part of his Mexican War experiences. The sights and experiences for James were interesting and valuable for him. Its importance cannot be discounted. On the 25th of May James was, as he said, "rigged out in Texas style" with a belt supporting two pistols, a bowie knife, a rifle, a shot pouch and a powder horn. On the first day, the goal was to reach the Sabine River, which was twenty miles away. Unfortunately, James and his friend "Lex" got stuck in a low muddy river bottom which was heavily timbered. A big problem was the mosquitoes present all the time. They finally got out of the area by James' firing his pistols and gaining the attention of some others across the Sabine River.¹⁵

After crossing the Sabine River James and his friend stopped at a house looking for breakfast. They were welcomed with open arms by a family named Youngblood who provided them with food for themselves and their horses. They were then in Rusk County. James considered the area beautiful because of "its gently swelling hills and beautiful, luxuriant grasses". After stopping at the Youngblood family James and Lex traveled until they had to stop at another house. The home belonged to a man named Doyle, who was from Virginia, but James considered him a poor specimen of humanity with an Indian wife.¹⁶ Almost

immediately after finishing a meal with Doyle the military company arrived. The company had gotten on the wrong road and were behind James and Lex. After traveling with the company to the town of Douglas, James and Lex rode ahead, and crossed the Nueces River. Another couple days riding brought them to the town of Crockett. Near Crockett, James saw some good-looking girls, as well as, wild turkey. Past Crockett, James and Lex rode until they came to the house of a Mr. Parker who was a member of the Texas Senate. Mr. Parker's wife was a Virginian but James was led to remark, ironically, that her weak point was an excessive admiration for everything Virginian.¹⁷ Her excessiveness apparently was a great embarrassment to James. Leaving the Parker home James and Lex came upon a Mexican named Balansueto. James attempted to talk to him in Spanish but his ability to communicate was minimal.¹⁸

Traveling a few days more brought the two to the Trinity River, the geographic line then, between Eastern and Western Texas. James and his friend crossed the river by ferry. The ferryman on the boat was an old veteran of the battle of San Jacinto. He was, interestingly, a bitter enemy of General Sam Houston, a native of Rockbridge County, Virginia. The ferryman credited the victory at San Jacinto to General T. J. Rusk not Houston.¹⁹

Crossing the Trinity River, the two came upon a long stretch of prairie. The prairie was immensely beautiful to James. He appreciated it so much that he wrote, "in some places whole acres of ground would present a most beautiful picture of delicate and contrasted land."²⁰

While crossing this particular area, James ironically ran into what he called "the meanest man I saw in Texas." A Mr. Roane by name, who after discovering they were volunteers, laid down the law that they would have "to score up" before anything was obtained. After staying a day to rest their horses, James and Lex quickly rode away from the unfriendly Mr. Roane.²¹ Several days of riding brought the two to the Brazos River. After crossing the river, they went into the town of Washington. Washington--on the Brazos--was like any other town now; but it was known as the place where the Texan Independence originated. Washington was the place where the Texas Congress was in session when the Independence of Texas, was declared, in 1836.²²

James and Lex did not stay long in Washington. A few days of riding brought them to the town of Faulkner where they met two ladies accompanied by two men. One of the men was a physician from Mississippi. The doctor handed James a newspaper giving an account of the battle and capture of Matamoras on the 8th and 9th of May. In addition, this

newspaper also reported that the U. S. Congress had appropriated ten million dollars for the war. These pieces of news brought joy to James who felt his service, in the war, effort might be appreciated.²³

Traveling on, James and Lex came upon the small town of Independence. Being, at a higher elevation, in the area, enabled James to see what was all around. The vastness of the prairie was magnificent. The scene of herds of cattle and horses grazing in a large expanse was truly a marvel. Homes surrounded by fields of maize and grain showed the fruits of settlement. The openness of the area was envied by James.²⁴

After leaving Independence, James and Lex, discovering that the Harrison County Company was ahead of them, attempted to catch up with them. On the way, James was thrown from his horse when his horse slipped into a hole on a bridge of logs. Fortunately, neither James nor his horse were hurt. After a while they caught up with the company and after spending a night with the company the two continued on to Austin. James and Lex passed the towns of Ruytersville and La Grange. Upon reaching La Grange, James met one of his close friends from back home. The friend was John H. Paxton from Lexington. James knew he was in Texas, but was greatly surprised to have found him. After talking for about two hours James and his companion got on horseback and rode off.

That same day they crossed the Colorado River and headed for Austin. Later on, James shot a squirrel and cooked it. James and Lex met some men from the Shelby County Companies carrying a roll of their volunteers to Austin. James invited them to join him and Lex and this they did. Along the way some money was found by the road which amounted to twenty dollars. When James and his companions came into the town of Bastrop, they inquired as to who might have lost the money. The money was lost by a woman, and when she received it, her thanks instilled a great feeling of integrity within James and his associates. With regard to the town of Bastrop James saw little promise for it (it exists still today) and here he saw his first mesquite tree.²⁵

In Bastrop James and his group met some men from the Rusk County Company who joined them. The total size of the group was now six. On their journey James bought a Mexican gourd which ~~is~~^{was} shaped like a figure eight. The importance of it was stressed by James because it would be tied to the pommel of your saddle to carry water. More importantly, the gourd could also carry the substance called "fire-water".²⁶

On the way to Austin James heard a report that Austin was being burnt by the Indians, but the report was taken very lightheartedly, since no other reports had been heard. Within eleven miles of Austin one of James' companions saw a friend

and wished to talk with him. After a while, James and Lex went by themselves to Austin. They reached Austin that same day.²⁷

For James B. Dorman the experience in Texas and Mexico was an extremely satisfying one. James was a private in Colonel Hamtrank's Virginia Regiment and took part in the Battle of Monterey. The experience might have been the most exciting and enjoyable one of his life. James said "I have seen more of the world than I shall probably ever see again and have gained a store of experience which whether profitable or not I would not barter for a store of gold."²⁸

After serving a year of duty in the Mexican War James returned to Lexington. He resumed his law practice and took an active role in local politics. James involved himself in all facets of public life. In his law practice he had many different cases, one involved a murder. A constable and his assistant went to arrest a man named Alcock. The assistant exchanged insults with Alcock and struck him three times with a club, causing his death. The assistant was forced to serve a long sentence in jail.²⁹

James took part in a number of organizations while in Lexington. He was in the Franklin Society which engaged in debates every week dealing with topics from the equality of women to the possible ^{presidential} candidacy of Zachary Taylor. James,

also, took an active part in the Sons of Temperance. The Sons of Temperance was a ~~secret~~ society which sought to curb disorder caused by drinking liquor. This particular society was very popular and many of the leaders of the community belonged to it.³⁰ Other societies which James belonged to and took an active part in were the Rockbridge Agricultural Society and the Alumni and Literary Society of Washington College and the American Colonization Society. James was a very active member of the latter society and served on its Ways and Means Committee.³¹ The American Colonization Society recommended the deportation of all Negroes to Liberia. This idea James believed in strongly and saw it as the answer to the slavery problem. The Society earnestly argued the necessity of the removal of all Negroes.³² Along with being a participant in all these societies James was also an Adjutant in the 8th Virginia Regiment. His service in the Regiment was largely a ~~habit~~^{discipline} left over from his V.M.I. and Mexican War Days.³³

The best position James held in public life prior to the Civil War was his membership in the Virginia House of Delegates. James' father, Charles Dorman, was a member of the House from 1833-1837, 1839-1842, and 1846-1848. James was elected to his father's seat in May, 1848. The victory was due largely to the votes James received in the

Court House ballot box in Lexington.³⁴ In that same election a Democrat, James G. Paxton was elected. The Democratic upset in the Whig stronghold of Rockbridge brought a word of advice from the Gazette, "We hope that the election of a Democrat from this county will hereafter be a warning to the Whigs who have produced such a result."³⁵ It was largely agreed that the upset was ~~due to a divisive~~ ^{a result of a split} Whig Party in Rockbridge.

James won elections to the House of Delegates in 1848 and 1850. Both times James' success can be attributed to the strong support he got in Lexington. In the House, James commented on a wide variety of issues. He was deeply involved in the Internal Improvements Controversy in Virginia. He urged passage of the bill to have a railroad from Covington to the Kanawha River or an extension of an already present railroad from Louisa.³⁶ James, also, sponsored a bill for an appropriation to the American Colonization Society for the removal of Negroes from Virginia.³⁷ In addition to this bill, James sponsored a bill that prohibited liquor from being sold to Negroes, free or slave.³⁸ While in the House of Delegates James served on the Committee on Militia Laws and the Committee on Privileges and Elections. In 1851 James decided not to run for the House of Delegates again. Support for James was so great that he had to reiterate his non-candidacy,

publicly, in the Lexington Gazette.³⁹ James was to remain a prominent political leader but he declined any public office, even the State Senate.⁴⁰

James, being in a position of leadership and deeply involved with politics, had conflicts with several individuals. The best known conflict was with the editor of the Lexington Gazette, James T. Patton. When James Dorman's father, Charles, died on December 20, 1849 the only acknowledgement of it was "Charles Dorman died at Rock Castle about 4 miles from Lexington on Thursday."⁴¹ To add to this ~~indignation~~ ^{indignity} was the absence of Patton from the traditional meeting of lawyers after the death of a prominent fellow-lawyer. James fought with Patton later on. In a letter addressed to Patton on October 18th, 1852 James stated that Patton used his name in connection with a "filthy" story. Also, Patton implied that Dorman was not supporting Winfield Scott for President because he wasn't promised an office. The office, James maintained, was never specified.⁴²

James B. Dorman was widely respected and considered a very efficient officeholder. He would be deeply involved in the impending conflict between the North and South. The fact that he would be elected to the Secession Convention of Virginia showed how much confidence the people of Rockbridge had in him.

Chapter IV - Footnotes

¹James B. Dorman, "Diary of James B. Dorman, 1841-1848", (Unpublished Document), p. 96.

²Ibid., p. 117.

³Ibid., p. 123.

⁴Ibid., p. 127.

⁵Ibid., p. 129.

⁶Ibid., p. 129.

⁷Ibid., p. 136.

⁸Ibid., p. 136.

⁹Ibid., p. 124.

¹⁰Ibid., p. 124.

¹¹Ibid., p. 124.

¹²Ibid., p. 135.

¹³Letter of James B. Dorman to Mary Davidson, May 24, 1846.

¹⁴Dorman, "Diary of James B. Dorman, 1841-1848", (Unpublished Document), p. 143-144.

¹⁵Ibid., p. 145-146.

¹⁶Ibid., p. 147.

¹⁷Ibid., p. 150.

¹⁸Ibid., p. 146, 150.

¹⁹Ibid., p. 150.

²⁰Ibid., p. 151.

²¹Ibid., p. 152.

- ²² Ibid., p. 151-153.
- ²³ Ibid., p. 154.
- ²⁴ Ibid., p. 155.
- ²⁵ Ibid., p. 156-158.
- ²⁶ Ibid., p. 158.
- ²⁷ Ibid., p. 158.
- ²⁸ Ibid., p. 177.
- ²⁹ Ibid., p. 178.
- ³⁰ Morton, History of Rockbridge County, p. 182.
- ³¹ Lexington Gazette, May 23, 1850.
- ³² Ibid., August 22, 1850.
- ³³ Dorman, "Diary of James B. Dorman, 1841-1848", (Unpublished Document), p. 176.
- ³⁴ Lexington Gazette, May 4, 1848.
- ³⁵ Ibid., May 4, 1848.
- ³⁶ Richmond Whig, January 11, 1850, p. 3.
- ³⁷ Ibid., February 2, 1850, p. 4.
- ³⁸ Ibid., December 6, 1850, p. 4.
- ³⁹ Lexington Gazette, December 4, 1851.
- ⁴⁰ Ibid., October 21, 1852.
- ⁴¹ Ibid., December 22, 1849.
- ⁴² Letter of James B. Dorman to James O. Patton, October 18, 1852.

Chapter V

The Virginia Secessionist Convention, 1861

The campaign year of 1860 involved James B. Dorman deeply. ~~In that election the last action of the electoral processes in the Union was~~ ^{the last} to take place before division erupted. A former Whig, James was to take the side of the Democratic Presidential candidate, Stephen A. Douglas. Most of the old and venerable Whig leaders of Rockbridge took the side of John Bell, the Constitutional Union candidate. James, however, was not alone because John Letcher, Governor of Virginia, too, supported Douglas for President. This position was not a popular one, among most Democrats in Virginia because the Democratic forces in Virginia, for the most part, supported John C. Breckenridge for President. Breckenridge looked ^{un-}favorable on a cotton confederacy while Douglas was a Unionist. The divisions were many in Rockbridge and the repercussions were later felt.¹

James saw trouble brewing. On January 2, 1860 he said, "The country seems to be going to destruction faster and faster every day."² In a letter to Governor John Letcher, he sympathized with Letcher's complicated position and only hoped that reason would triumph. Towards potential secessionists James felt that a guideline was needed to be sure no disruptions would occur. James was attempting to accomplish the hard task of quelling passionate emotions that might lead to division.

On May 12, 1860 James firmly established his affiliation with Douglas. In Bell, the Constitutional Union candidate, although a Unionist, he saw no real promise. James, in looking around Rockbridge, felt that Bell commanded no large support and that response to him was generally weak.³ When the heat of the election was intensified, James saw that his assertion was wrong. He felt that he stood almost alone in supporting Douglas.⁴

The results of the Presidential election of 1860 were extremely disappointing to James. Abraham Lincoln, a northerner, a Republican ~~and an abolitionist~~, won. The voting, however, reflected the sectionalism that was prevalent. The South, generally, supported the southern candidates, Bell and Breckenridge. Rockbridge County was different in that Douglas received more votes than Breckenridge. However, John Bell got the most votes in Rockbridge. Natural Bridge was a Breckenridge stronghold because several leaders there were in favor of secession. Overall, there was not a general upsurge of secessionist feeling in Rockbridge and most hoped that the constitution would restrain any abolitionist intentions of Lincoln.⁵

James, although disappointed, was hopeful. He thought the people of the area were "thoroughly Union in feeling" and that they would not follow any of the actions of South Carolina or the secessionist faction. James wanted Virginia to assume

the position of mediator since it was neither a direct partner of the cotton states nor a member of the Northern states. The cause of secession to James, seemed weak in other border states. North Carolina and Kentucky appeared to be against secession. Missouri and Tennessee also appeared to be adverse to the thought. Virginia, according to James, had partners in preventing a Civil War. The border states were as different from the other states as the cotton states were to New England. A combined effort of the border states and others such as Pennsylvania and New Jersey could prevent the division. If the division was not prevented Virginia would suffer ^{as} ⁹ ~~probably~~ ^{battleground} ~~the same consequences~~. James confessed to Governor Letcher that he hoped that most of the radical secessionists could be contained. If this was possible Virginia's interests would be protected to the fullest.⁶

In Rockbridge the problems at hand were being discussed. Several preliminary meetings were held, in late November, but all groups were not present, at the same time. On December 3, 1860 a mass meeting was held at the Lexington Court House. The Chairman of the group, David E. Moore, presented the resolutions. The resolutions went from praising the American Constitution and condemning abolitionist activities to ^{calling} ~~express-~~ ~~ing~~ Lincoln's election as "a violation of constitutional principles."⁷ James, at this meeting, attacked South Carolina

for its hasty call for a secessionist convention.⁸ By the end of the meeting, however, another committee was set up to introduce a resolution on secession, ~~of~~^{to} which James was named. James at this time was keeping in close contact with Governor John Letcher, a Rockbridge native. He told Letcher that he was happy to hear that he was strongly Unionist and that most of the people in Rockbridge viewed secession as "a last resort". James, also, told Letcher that most were sympathetic with the South and the cotton states but deprecated the action of South Carolina towards secession.⁹

South Carolina did not take long to make the call for secession. On December 20, 1860, the South Carolina secession convention in Charleston voted unanimously to leave the Union. Secession was no longer a possibility but a reality. On January 7, 1861 Governor Letcher spoke to a special session of the Virginia Legislature. He praised the union and condemned South Carolina's secession. Most of all, he maintained that Virginia's duty was to be a mediator in the matter.¹⁰

On January 7 a meeting was held on secession at the Lexington Courthouse. Some resolutions were presented by a committee. The resolutions supported Virginia staying in the Union. But, the arguments between the Unionists and Secessionists became so loud that a secret vote was taken on the resolutions. Meetings held after this one were separate ones, supporting

either the Secessionist cause or the Unionist cause. Meanwhile, Mississippi seceded on the 9th followed by Florida on the 10th, and Alabama on the 11th. The pressures resulting from these actions forced the Virginia Legislature to call a state secession convention on February 13, 1861.¹¹

The Unionist leaders in Rockbridge met together on the 11th to pick their candidates for the Secession convention. Several men were considered but in the end Samuel McDowell Moore and James Dorman were unanimously approved. James felt very confident for he thought that he would receive support from the entire Douglas and Bell factions with possibly a fraction of the Breckenridge vote.¹²

The Secessionists in Rockbridge met and picked Judge John W. Brockenborough and C. C. Baldwin to run against Moore and Dorman. Brockenborough supported a conditional secession while Baldwin was for an immediate one. James Dorman regarded Brockenborough's chances as "hopeless".¹³ On January 21st a country-wide meeting of several hundred people was held in which a nominating committee unanimously chose Sam Moore and Dorman. The meeting also, approved the adoption of the Crittenden plan. This was to amend the Constitution to make slavery inviolate except by state law, compensate owners for fugitive slaves and extend the Missouri Compromise line to the Pacific.¹⁴ On January 26th James said that he would oppose

the passage of Federal troops through Virginia to coerce the seceded states.¹⁵ In the Lexington Gazette James in an open letter repeated his support for the Union and stated that if Virginia left the Union, war was inevitable.¹⁶

The election was an overwhelming mandate for James Dorman and Samuel Moore. James received 1,875 votes while Moore got 1,844. Brockenborough received 282 votes and Baldwin 75. James had overwhelming support in Lexington, Kerr's Creek, Fairfield and Brownsburg. The resolution of popular ratification for secession received a large majority in Rockbridge, more than 1500 votes. Throughout the state, Unionists met success. Of the one hundred and fifty-two delegates only about 30 to 40 were secessionists. The motion for an immediate secession was defeated but the final decision was still left to the secessionist convention.¹⁷

The situation elsewhere reflected the crisis at hand. The January sessions of the United States Senate were filled with farewell speeches of senators from the already seceded states. The formation of a Southern Confederacy was made in February and Jefferson Davis was inaugurated President in Montgomery on February 22.¹⁸

In Virginia, the Unionists were hoping that the Secessionist Convention would discourage any possible rash actions. The Convention opened in Richmond on February 13. James was

full of optimism and hope. He wrote to his cousin, James Dorman Davidson, a well-known lawyer, that the group of delegates were fine in personal appearance and ability.¹⁹ James had been to Washington, just previously, to the opening of the ^{old gentleman's} convention and in his letter to James D. Davidson he expressed the opinion that although the Republicans were not in favor of compromises they did seem to feel that the question of secession and slavery should be submitted to the people. Based on this both Dorman and Davidson saw hope in compromise. James D. Davidson wrote to James Dorman that the North should leave ^{the} abolitionists to themselves and let slavery alone in the South.²⁰ The Peace Conference in Washington brought a hope for compromise and on that hope many of the delegates to the convention seemed to depend.

The moderates were, in control, at the convention. They supported a committee on Federal relations and Samuel McDowell Moore was placed upon it. Each day debate was constant. Samuel McDowell Moore engaged, in a heated debate, with former Governor Henry Wise on February 16th. Unfortunately, as a result of Wise's great oratorical skills Moore did not fare well.²¹ On February 25th Samuel McDowell Moore introduced five resolutions. The five resolutions were that the South wanted an end to abolitionist activities; Virginia would never join the Confederacy in African slave trade; Virginia would

firmative for the proposal.

refuse to endorse government by direct taxation; the Crittenden compromise would be approved; and finally, if all previous conditions were not agreed upon by the North then Virginia would join the other seceded states.²² The speech Moore delivered with the resolutions greatly antagonized the secessionists at the convention. He was hooted at, for a while, but later all was calm. His resolutions were tabled and finally dropped in March.

The first few days of March were spent waiting for the final report by the Committee on Federal Relations and Lincoln's Inaugural Address. James had been contented to stay quiet through the first couple of weeks of the Convention since as he said "there were too many speeches."²³ On March 1, James presented a resolution that said the Federal Union was made up of people of several states and that disunion could be done by the people. He proposed, in addition, that Virginia should support efforts to have a popular vote on the secession problem.²⁴ The resolution did not pass the convention. Later on, the secessionists, proposed to the convention, that the commissioners sent, to make up the Peace Conference be made non-voting delegates at the Secessionist Convention. James opposed the proposal, at first, saying they were not elected by the people and that they were being too secretive in the Peace Conference. After some debate James voted in the affirmative for the proposal.²⁵

On March 1, 1861 Abraham Lincoln delivered his Inaugural address. In the address, he renewed his respect for slavery in the states and the Fugitive Slave Laws but he did not recognize the right to secede from the Union. The speech was ambivalent leaning to compromise sometimes then to force, at other times. The words of force were stressed much more loudly than the words of compromise. In Virginia the secessionists demanded immediate secession but the moderates still wanted to wait. Governor John Letcher favored a conference of border states and if the wave of secession, was inexorable, then a border confederacy, freedom from the Northern States or the Cotton states, would be better.²⁶

The Inaugural speech caused a great stir in Richmond. The Richmond Dispatch, a secessionist newspaper, attacked Lincoln for denying, each state, the right of secession. The tide had switched towards secession and some Unionist delegates were leaning towards secession. James only hoped that war could be averted.²⁷

On March 5, James spoke to the Convention. He maintained that Virginia must wait on secession. James said that the secession of Virginia meant war. War was not an inevitable consequence, declared James, rather it could be avoided because Virginia was not, in the same situation, as other seceded states. James argued that the die was not cast; but that those

states, that had seceded could return to the union, if they wanted, since their confederacy had been founded, on the acknowledged right, of secession. More importantly, Virginia, believed James, was not tied to the seceded states. He felt that Virginia could get no assistance from the Cotton States and that Virginia most likely was going to carry the brunt of any attacks. Virginia must think of safety for herself. Instead of worrying about the rights of South Carolina or Georgia, Virginia must protect itself first. James felt that there was no homogeneity with the cotton states to the point of going to war together. The slaveholding interest was not enough to overpower the interest of peace. James said to the convention:

"I can but echo, with all my heart, the declaration of England's great captain, who, after a long course of years spent in warfare in the Eastern Hemisphere and upon the soil of his own continent of Europe, declared, in his place in the House of Peers, that to save his country from the forces of one month of civil war, he would cheerfully sacrifice his life."²⁸

James continued, in his speech, to say that common respect required the convention to look at the Committee on Federal Relations' report. James, most of all, wanted his fellow delegates to act "coolly" and "deliberately."²⁹

James' general purpose was to try and halt any hasty movements towards secession. He, however, was not without his contradictions. James felt compelled to express an opinion on

coercion. If coercion existed Virginia must resist it. The matter of states' rights also must be upheld especially regarding Virginia's rights, as independent and sovereign from others. Despite some statements in favor of the seceded states, James remained for the most part in his speeches anti-secessionist. The secession of the already seceded states was unjust and injurious. Virginia needed to be unified for its own good and safety. Unity to James was a necessity to protect Virginia from armed conflict.³⁰

In Rockbridge County ^{people} ~~attitudes~~ were becoming even more apprehensive about the crisis. James D. Davidson felt that Lincoln would wait for the South to make the first move. James Dorman felt that if Lincoln did wait then "all would go well."³¹ The delay in action on the secessionist question, however, began to annoy people. Secessionists in Lexington said the state was "crawling on its belly and eating dirt." When the secessionists in the convention realized the value in delay they proceeded to filibuster. Henry Wise on one day, read the entire Confederate Constitution. The secessionists at this time, also, publicized the fact that the convention was costing \$2,600 a day to operate.³² Unfortunately for the Unionists they did not recognize the harm in delay and joined in the perpetrating of it even more. James Dorman was one of the Unionists who was a culprit. He proposed several

resolutions which delayed any real action. On March 18 he proposed the separation of amendments dealing with presidential elections and the citizenship of those of African blood from any discussions on the secession. On March 23 James made another resolution dealing with a tax on Northern goods and their sale in Virginia. To his cousin Hannah Davidson, he said, "I throw in a few words "in season" occasionally--and may in the course of the next week or so make an hour's speech for home consumption."³³ Although thinking that delay would help, James soon received reports that there was a deep and growing dissatisfaction with the delay of the convention. This dissatisfaction and impatience soon touched James. He, himself, said, "If this state of things continues much longer I shall almost despair of any good result attending our labors."³⁴ James felt it safe to calculate that of the 152 members at the convention 140 had something always to say. The delay was definitely beginning to shift the balance towards the secessionists.³⁵

In the month of March the secessionists began to increase their power through purchasing newspapers. The Richmond Whig, a Unionist newspaper, went over to the secessionist side partially in late March and completely in early April. James saw the harm in losing the Whig. If the Whig was lost, then the Unionists would be without a newspaper to speak for them

in Richmond. The absence of an editorial voice in Richmond severely hampered the Unionists and attempts were made to set up a new Unionist newspaper in Richmond. Meanwhile in Rockbridge, the Lexington Valley Star changed hands and it shifted to a secessionist policy. With the voice of the Valley Star behind them the secessionists in Rockbridge began to clamor more for secession.³⁶

James D. Davidson wrote his cousin James of a meeting of secessionists at Natural Bridge on March 30th. A petition urging James and Samuel Moore to vote for secession had already been circulated and fifty people had signed it before a friend of James D. Davidson burned it. At the secessionist meeting thirty men were present and several resolutions were passed. One of the resolutions accused Dorman and Moore of misrepresenting the county. Another said that Virginia should secede and join the confederacy. The Lexington Gazette attacked the meeting for being closed and argued that if the meeting was open the resolutions would not have passed.³⁷ On April 1st the secessionists held another meeting in the Lexington Court House yard. Attempts were made to go into the Court House but they proved unsuccessful. Signatures for the 'Secessionists' paper were solicited but there was not much success. Despite this, there was still widespread anxiety over the Convention. James D. Davidson said, "The restlessness in the minds of the

people, produced by the Convention "dragging its slow lengths along" is often."³⁸ As each day went by this restlessness grew also. The editor of the pro-Union, Lexington Gazette, J. R. McNutt, was promised 400 new subscribers if the Gazette went secessionist.³⁹

At the Secessionist Convention in Richmond events were fast breaking. On April 4th an ordinance of secession was introduced. The ordinance was defeated easily by the Unionists eighty-eight votes to fifty-five. Lincoln, however, fueled the fires of passion on April 6th when he ordered the U. S. Navy to land supplies at Fort Sumter in Charleston, South Carolina. The ~~reinforcement~~^{resupplying} caught all the Unionists by surprise and encouraged the secessionists. James wrote to James D. Davidson about the bad news. He said on April 9th: "It is worse and worse today."⁴⁰ The ~~reinforcing~~^{resupplying} of Fort Sumter confirmed in James the inevitability. Seven companies of Confederate troops were in Charleston to participate in the bombardment of Fort Sumter. James mourned the attack and despaired at the thought that he could not stop the inexorability of secession. James confessed his despair to James D. Davidson when he said, "In strict confidence I have little heart for anything with my apprehensions of what is soon to be upon us."⁴¹

After ~~several days~~^{a day} of bombardment Fort Sumter surrendered on April 14, 1861. The following day Abraham Lincoln called for

75,000 volunteers to put down the rebellion. This act was the coup de grace for the Unionist cause. James had thought just a few days earlier of submitting an alternative proposition of secession of Border states but this idea was out the window with Lincoln's action.⁴² James now feared that Rockbridge County would suffer division because of the likelihood of Eastern Virginia and Tran-Alleghany Virginia splitting up. James wanted Virginia to stay out of the conflict. He felt that if a separate secession or border union would be presented to the people then some damage could be averted.⁴³

The burden of decision weighed heavily on James. He had no doubt in his mind ~~whether~~^{that} secession would be passed, or not, but he did not know whether he would vote for it. James wanted to vote the way Rockbridge would have wanted him to, but he did not know Rockbridge's sentiments. James was convinced that Rockbridge County would react strongly against "Lincoln's arrogant and infamous usurpation of power," but he did not like the idea of war. Secession was one thing, war another. The responsibility of war was heavy on James' conscience. James remarked, "God save me from ever being placed in a position of such overwhelming care and responsibility again."⁴⁴

On April 1, 1861 a call for Border State cooperation was defeated and the ordinance of secession was proposed. James B. Dorman voted for the ordinance while his fellow Rockbridge

colleague Samuel Moore held out and voted against it. The ordinance of secession in the Convention passed eighty-eight votes to forty-five. Virginia was declared out of the Union pending a popular vote on May 23rd. The vote in Rockbridge was 1,728 votes to 1 in favor of secession. The conflict that James Dorman fought so hard to prevent was now to begin.⁴⁵

⁴⁵ Norton, History of Rockbridge County, p. 114-115.

⁴⁶ Letter of James B. Dorman to John Letcher, November 18, 1860.

⁴⁷ Crenshaw, "Rockbridge County and the Secession Convention of 1861", Proceedings Rockbridge Historical Society - Volume III, p. 8.

⁴⁸ Pittsburg, "Rockbridge County and the Secession Crisis, 1859-1861", (Unpublished Honors Thesis), Washington and Lee University, 1974, p. 51.

⁴⁹ James B. Dorman to John Letcher, November 27, 1860.

⁵⁰ Pittsburg, "Rockbridge County and the Secession Crisis, 1859-1861", (Unpublished Honors Thesis), p. 51.

⁵¹ Ibid., p. 51.

⁵² Letter of James B. Dorman to John Letcher, January 13, 1861.

⁵³ Ibid., January 13, 1861.

⁵⁴ Pittsburg, "Rockbridge County and the Secession Crisis, 1859-1861", (Unpublished Honors Thesis), p. 51.

⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 70.

⁵⁶ Lexington Gazette, January 31, 1861.

⁵⁷ Norton, History of Rockbridge County, p. 119.

Chapter V - Footnotes

¹Ollinger Crenshaw, "Rockbridge County and the Secession Convention of 1861", Proceedings-Rockbridge Historical Society - Volume III, p. 7.

²Letters of James B. Dorman to John Letcher, January 2, 1860.

³Ibid., May 22, 1860.

⁴Ibid., October 14, 1860.

⁵Morton, History of Rockbridge County, p. 114-115.

⁶Letter of James B. Dorman to John Letcher, November 18, 1860.

⁷Crenshaw, "Rockbridge County and the Secession Convention of 1861", Proceedings-Rockbridge Historical Society - Volume III, p. 8.

⁸Thomas Rittenburg, "Rockbridge County and the Secession Crisis, 1859-1861", (Unpublished Honors Thesis), Washington and Lee University, 1975, p. 51.

⁹James B. Dorman to John Letcher, November 27, 1860.

¹⁰Rittenburg, "Rockbridge County and the Secession Crisis, 1859-1861", (Unpublished Honors Thesis), p. 61.

¹¹Ibid., p. 62.

¹²Letter of James B. Dorman to John Letcher, January 13, 1861.

¹³Ibid., January 13, 1861.

¹⁴Rittenburg, "Rockbridge County and the Secession Crisis, 1859-1861", (Unpublished Honors Thesis), p. 69.

¹⁵Ibid., p. 70.

¹⁶Lexington Gazette, January 31, 1861.

¹⁷Morton, History of Rockbridge County, p. 119.

¹⁸Crenshaw, "Rockbridge County and the Secession Convention of 1861", Proceedings-Rockbridge Historical Society-Volume III, p. 9.

¹⁹Letter of James B. Dorman to James D. Davidson, February 14, 1861.

²⁰Ibid., February 13, 1861.

²¹Rittenburg, "Rockbridge County and the Secession Crisis, 1859-1861", (Unpublished Honors Thesis), p. 75.

²²Morton, History of Rockbridge County, p. 120.

²³Letter of James B. Dorman to Greenlee Davidson, February 27, 1861.

²⁴George H. Reese, ed., Proceedings of the Virginia State Convention of 1861, Volume I, p. 281.

²⁵Reese, Proceedings, p. 308.

²⁶Boney, John Letcher of Virginia, p. 109.

²⁷Rittenburg, "Rockbridge County and the Secession Crisis, 1859-1861", (Unpublished Honors Thesis), p. 80-81.

²⁸Reese, Proceedings, p. 402; Dorman, "Speech to the Convention", (Unpublished document), p. 6.

²⁹Reese, Proceedings, p. 403.

³⁰Dorman, "Speech to the Convention", (Unpublished document), p. 11.

³¹Letter of James B. Dorman to James D. Davidson, March 8, 1861.

³²Rittenburg, "Rockbridge County and the Secession Crisis, 1859-1861", (Unpublished Honors Thesis), p. 85.

³³Letter of James B. Dorman to Hannah Davidson, March 15, 1861.

³⁴Letter of James B. Dorman to James D. Davidson, March 22, 1861.

³⁵ Crenshaw, "Rockbridge County and the Secession Convention of 1861", Proceedings - Rockbridge Historical Society - Volume III, p. 11.

³⁶ Ibid., p. 11.

³⁷ Lexington Gazette, April 11, 1861.

³⁸ Letter of James B. Dorman to James D. Davidson, April 1, 1861.

³⁹ Letter of James D. Davidson to James B. Dorman, April 1, 1861.

⁴⁰ Letter of James B. Dorman to James D. Davidson, April 9, 1861.

⁴¹ Ibid., April 9, 1861.

⁴² Ibid., April 12, 1861.

⁴³ Ibid., April 14, 1861.

⁴⁴ Ibid., April 16, 1861.

⁴⁵ Crenshaw, "Rockbridge County and the Secession Convention of 1861", Proceedings - Rockbridge Historical Society - Volume III, p. 13.

Chapter VI

Civil War

For James B. Dorman the Civil War was to be an extremely frustrating time in his life. He was caught in the confusion of the times and never really happy with any of the results. He, willingly, fulfilled his duties to the Confederacy and Virginia but he never felt the war was worth it all.

Virginia was into the fray almost immediately after the Act of Secession was passed by the Secessionist Convention in Richmond. On April 18th troops from Virginia seized the Federal arsenal at Harper's Ferry. In connection with this action Governor Letcher ordered the Rockbridge Rifles and Rockbridge Dragoons to Harper's Ferry. Back in Richmond, the Secessionist Convention was deep in the preparation for war. Samuel McDowell Moore on April 29th nominated John W. Brockenborough to be one of Virginia's delegates to the Confederate Congress. James seconded the nomination of his long-time political opponent, Brockenborough, who won easily.¹

James was not to join at first in the military conflict; instead he ran for the Rockbridge seat in the House of Delegates in May, 1861. He unfortunately was soundly beaten. The winners were Samuel McDowell Moore, who got 1,127 votes, and Francis F. Anderson, who received 1,035 votes. James got 633 votes.² James, however, continued his service in the Secessionist

Convention. While traveling back to Richmond on the Virginia Central Railroad, he saw much war preparation. James saw a dress parade at Spotswood in which many of his former cadet buddies were involved. In Richmond, he heard Governor Letcher describe the military operations already, at hand, along with the plan to go to Northwest Virginia and secure it for the Confederacy.³ He noted, on June 19, at the Secession Convention the constitution of the Confederate States of America was adopted unanimously. James concluded his duties as a delegate and he prepared to enter the service. He wrote to his cousin James D. Davidson, to save his gun because he was going to join a military company soon.⁴ The situation of volunteering was, however, not that easy. To Cousin James, he wrote that the organization for joining up was all mixed up. Conflict between authorities plagued the process of volunteering. James wrote that the pay for a Lieutenant Colonel was about that of a Captain.⁵ On July 8, 1861 James wrote to Davidson that he thought he was in line for a very good position under General B. D. Fry from Alabama, who was a friend from Mexican War days. James hoped that he would be given a position as a field officer. These hopes were however dashed by an obscure rule that you had to be aligned with a unit for three years.⁶ On July 12, 1861 James rode with Governor Letcher to help him hold Western Virginia. The party consisting of the Governor,

General C. G. Coleman of Louisa County, General H. R. Jackson of Georgia, James and all their aides held camp at Camp Garnett, in what is now Randolph County, West Virginia.⁷ At Camp Garnett James saw Greenlee Davidson, James D. Davidson's son, and both remarked at their awkward appearance. James was wearing a checked, lead-colored shirt with a revolver and knife in his waist. He, also, had a double-barreled gun slung around his back.⁸ Both were dressed for battle.

At the first Manassas battle Frederick Davidson, a son of James D. Davidson and a cousin of James, was killed. James attempted to secure his body from a grave at Manassas Junction but the disorder surrounding the area forced James to leave without the body. James returned to Lexington a few days after visiting the battleground.⁹

Later on in the year James was approached by Governor Letcher to run for the state senate seat left vacant by James G. Paxton. James, definitely wanted to serve in the state senate rather than serve in the military. The outlook, however, was not bright. Other candidates were more popular. The leading candidate was William Frazier and the other candidates were J. R. McNutt and James W. Massie. James told Letcher that he thought he had the support of the men of the old party, meaning Whigs.¹⁰ This, he hoped, would help his cause. After a while, James realized his position was hopeless and bowed

out of the competition. The result was that William Frazier won. James, although not a candidate was blamed by James W. Massie for causing his defeat. James ignored this accusation.¹¹

James' unsuccessful attempts at politics led him to become more involved in the military effort. James hoped to be placed in a position, as a field officer, but he was greatly disappointed. The appointive system for officers in the Confederate army was changed in favor of the elective system. James did not know whether to join the heavy artillery or face the draft. The draft was a horror to James. He said, "If I were placed in such a fix (being drafted) I don't know how I would escape."¹² James earnestly hoped for election as an officer so that he would not have to join a unit in which he was not happy. James was convinced that the common soldiers would not pick good officers. To Governor Letcher, he claimed he saw the bad effect of elective officers in the Mexican War. James felt that under the appointive system bad officers were the exception while under the elective system they were the rule.¹³ James only hoped that providence would provide a position satisfactory to his desires.¹⁴

In March of 1862 James was commissioned a Major in the 9th Virginia infantry and he had had his way. At the commissioning James wore a Navy revolver and a dress sword recaptured from a Yankee at Manassas. He also spent some money in having

a handsome uniform made. James said of it, "It has a quantity of gold lace on the sleeves, with scarlet cuffs and collar and a glittering star too on the latter."¹⁵ James was stationed at Camp Winder, Virginia,^{near Fredericksburg} in April, 1862. There an orderly routine occurred, quite apart, from the confusion in most military camps. Reville was at 5 A.M.; guard mounting at 8; company drill at 11; battalion drill at 3 P.M., and dress parade at 5 P.M.. James seemed to enjoy his time at Camp Winder and in fact claimed he had four sweethearts in the nearby city.¹⁶ James, however, knew that battle was near. The uncertainty of war plagued him. To his cousin Mary Davidson, daughter of James D. Davidson, he spoke about these uncertainties. He wrote upon receiving his marching orders to go to Fredericksburg:

"I really do not know whether the service can be considered a very hazardous one. I only know that the movement embarks us on the full tide of practical if experimental, action, at the very crisis of the country's destiny; and that at such a time, amid the shifting scenes of a great war extended over an immense theatre, and yet each part influencing the other, it is idle as it is impossible for anyone to speculate even upon where and how he may be at the end of a week."¹⁷

On April 23, 1862, James wrote to his cousin James D. that the regiment he was in had been organized as an artillery regiment and mustered in for "local service." James hoped to

be in the fighting. He expressed the hope of hearing firing and possibly exchanging shots with ~~them.~~ ^{the Union} Disenchantment, however, plagued James' regiment. Some men in the regiment, including officers, were not happy with the way things were going. Finally, Colonel John L. Porter set about to reorganize the regiment. Since the elective system was in force, James was unsure where he stood for the future. He was disgruntled at the possibility of missing a chance to fight.¹⁸

The process of reorganization soon placed James in the Camp of Instruction where volunteers, prior to enrollment in a particular company, were trained and drilled. Often times such camps proved to be a great help when forces needed to be regrouped after suffering great losses. James was placed in a Camp of Instruction near Richmond where he also could be an aide to Governor Letcher. James, however, was not happy with the disintegration of the regiment he belonged to.¹⁹ He blamed the unfortunate result upon two generals. The two generals were General Joseph Reid Anderson and General Charles W. Field. James tried to keep the regiment intact but General Field took 25 to 30 men from the regiment's ranks and put them in another battery of light artillery. The remainder of the regiment was ordered by General Anderson to Richmond where they were placed in a Camp of Instruction. The situation was highly unsatisfactory for James. Field's action was considered

unlawful by James but there appeared to be no other recourse than to accept the unfortunate events. James, however, was able to go home to Lexington and look for recruits. He, also, was assured by Governor Letcher that he would be given a field office under General John B. Floyd.²⁰

The field office was not to be. James was placed at the Camp of Instruction at Dublin, Virginia. At Dublin Station, James was in charge of organizing all the volunteers, as well as the new conscripts there. The action that James sought was much farther away than he ever hoped. While James was training and organizing troops tragedy struck constantly with each new battle. Probably the greatest tragedy for James was the death of his close friend and cousin, Captain Greenlee Davidson, at the battle of Chancellorsville on May 3, 1863. James wrote to his cousin and Greenlee's sister, Hannah, "In whatever hopes I had for the future, the renewal of my intimate association with Greenlee formed one of the chief pleasures, and now the thought that his place in the family circle is vacant forever pierces me with grief."²¹ The toll of war had reached James personally.

While at Dublin Station James was involved mostly in training, but skirmishes occurred every now and then. In a letter to his cousin Hannah, on July 21, 1863, James spoke of a skirmish. Forty men of James' conscript guard and thirty citizens of the nearby town of Newburn fought with a large

force of Yankees. Sixty Yankees were either killed or wounded including some of the Union officers. This set their expedition back immensely. James, however, was not able to take part in the skirmish because he was Commander of the post at Dublin and had to remain.²²

In the year of 1864 James was still a Major and still connected to the Camp of Instruction which was moved nearby to the town of Newburn. In May of 1864 James was involved in the battle of Cloyd's Mountain. At this battle James had to remove all the records of the camp when a retreat was ordered. The Confederates were able to ~~allude~~^{elude} the Yankee by crossing the New River. The Camp of Instruction, however, was destroyed, in part, and some nearby buildings were burned too. In the confusion James' horse was stolen from a nearby pasture.²³

For a good part of 1864, James continued to train officers.

In October, 1864 the Camp of Instruction was discontinued and James ended up, in Richmond, as an ~~aide~~^{adjutant} to Colonel James Shields. For the most part, James had a steady job with paperwork. His food and board, in Richmond, amounted to four hundred dollars a month and his total pay was six hundred dollars. His hours of work were generally from 9 to 3 and most of the work was performed in his office. The war and its horrors were far away from his daily experiences. James wrote to his cousin James Davidson in December of 1864, "I think I shall have a pleasant

winter. No one here dreams that Grant will be able to do anything to disturb our serenity -- so long as General Lee keeps watch and ward over the city."²⁴

The experience of the Civil War did not end, for James, in Richmond. On February 28, 1865 James was assigned to duty under Major General D. H. Hill at Augusta, Georgia, by the assistant Adjutant General Jonathan Withers in Richmond.²⁵

James had his field office finally. He had gotten it largely through the assistance of his friend Brigadier General B. D. Fry whom James several years before had requested the same from and had been refused. The only known activities of James under General Fry was a responsibility to protect Augusta. Even though the war in Virginia had already ended James issued a command to a battalion on May 1, 1865 to proceed to the courthouse in Augusta and "quell any disturbances" that might occur.²⁶ James believed in keeping order whether the Confederacy actually existed or not.

James' participation in the war was much less than he expected. His regiment fell apart before it could really get involved in anything. He did experience skirmishes, while in Western Virginia, at the Camp of Instruction, but he never really was in anything like the grand engagements witnessed in the other parts of Virginia. What was left for James was to establish a new life in a Virginia and a United States that had changed greatly because of the horrible conflict.

Chapter VI - Footnotes

- ¹ Reese, Proceedings of the Virginia State Convention of 1861, Volume IV, p. 612.
- ² Lexington Gazette, May 30, 1861.
- ³ Letter of James B. Dorman to James D. Davidson, June 12, 1861.
- ⁴ Ibid., June 19, 1861.
- ⁵ Ibid., July 1, 1861.
- ⁶ Ibid., July 8, 1861.
- ⁷ Turner, "James B. Dorman's Civil War Letters", (Unpublished Article), p. 14.
- ⁸ Letter of James B. Dorman to James D. Davidson, July 12, 1861.
- ⁹ Ibid., July 25, 1861.
- ¹⁰ Letter of James B. Dorman to John Letcher, December 11, 1861.
- ¹¹ Ibid., December 26, 1861.
- ¹² Letter of James B. Dorman to Greenlee Davidson, February 7, 1862.
- ¹³ Letter of James B. Dorman to John Letcher, February 7, 1862.
- ¹⁴ Ibid., February 7, 1862.
- ¹⁵ Letter of James B. Dorman to James D. Davidson, March 10, 1862.
- ¹⁶ Letter of James B. Dorman to Clara Davidson, April 6, 1861.
- ¹⁷ Letter of James B. Dorman to Mary Davidson, April 19, 1862.

¹⁸Letter of James B. Dorman to James D. Davidson,
April 23, 1862.

¹⁹Ibid., May 25, 1862.

²⁰Ibid., May 30, 1862.

²¹Letter of James B. Dorman to Hannah Davidson,
May 6, 1863.

²²Ibid., July 21, 1863.

²³Letter of Albert Davidson to Susan Davidson, May 17,
1864.

²⁴Letter of James B. Dorman to James D. Davidson,
December 4, 1864.

²⁵War of the Rebellion Records, Series I, Volume 47,
p. 1291.

²⁶Ibid., Series I, Volume 53, p. 420.

SUMMARY

~~James Dorman's Life After The War~~

With the war over, James chose largely to stay on the sidelines. James traveled across the United States, North and South, in the summer following the fall of the Confederacy. James went to Cincinnati, Baltimore and Philadelphia among other places. He found agreement with some "Copperheads" (Confederate sympathizers) he met in Indiana. Both he and the Copperheads held a great hatred for the Republicans. James said that the Copperheads had as much hatred for the Black Republicans as the South had for Massachusetts Yankees. In September, of 1865, James was in Louisiana. There he witnessed first hand some of the dramatic changes coming in the South. Four regiments were in New Orleans with two being Negro. James spoke of the Negroes as being unbearable and "impudent, idle and profligate in their teachings." The most unbearable thing James witnessed was public miscegenation, a Yankee schoolmaster was to be married to a Negro waitress. James, also, wrote that the white women were fearful of walking the streets because of the presence of Negro guards.¹ The South was changing and James found it offensive to his old customs and beliefs.

Back in Lexington, James resumed his law practice although there was slim legal pickings in the area.

Lexington had been hard hit by the war. However, the economy picked up some, as a result of, the large harvests of corn, rye and oats.² James immersed himself in the legal world. He was associated with ex-Governor John Letcher on several cases. One particular case was the shooting of a freedman, who had bumped the carriage of a Dr. James Watson on November 13, 1866. A Rockbridge County Court of five magistrates voted three to two not to turn the case over to a jury. The military commander in Virginia, General John M. Schofield, felt the court's decision was a direct threat to the rights of all freedmen and he had Dr. Watson arrested and brought to Richmond for trial before a military commission. John Letcher and James traveled to Richmond to help in the case for the defense. They challenged the right of the military commission to try a civilian. Schofield rejected the case of the defense but Letcher appealed to President Andrew Johnson. Johnson, after some consultation with his Attorney General, released Dr. Watson. The victory was sweet but it fueled the passions of the Radical Republicans for a stricter Reconstruction.³

James' life after the war was simple and uneventful compared to his previous years. He handled all types of cases: debt collection, estate divisions, suits involving individuals and institutions. James often got together with

some of his old friends such as John Letcher and James D. Davidson and reminisced of old times. Parties were not an unusual sight with much whiskey and tobacco used. When General Robert E. Lee died in Lexington on October 12, 1870 James was instrumental in forming the Lee Memorial Association for the purpose of building a suitable memorial for General Lee. James was in charge of distributing circulars asking for contributions for the Association. James, also, made extensive attempts to procure money from the well-to-do McCormick family of the McCormick reaper fortune from Rockbridge County, then located in Chicago. James' efforts along with many others, helped in making the recumbent statue to Lee and his tomb a reality.⁴

In March of 1871, at the age of forty-seven, James finally married. His wife was the daughter of Matthew White, Mary Louise White who had already been married before to a Captain L. Wilson Newman who was killed at the Battle of Winchester on September 19, 1862.⁵ James' marriage appeared to be a happy one. Attempts, however, to have children were unsuccessful or ended tragically. Two children died in infancy. One child, Charles P. Dorman Jr., was almost three years old when he died. There was a child from Mary White Newman's previous marriage, Lillie Scott Newman. James led a quiet life now, but he still entertained some new ideas.

One time he thought of buying a buffalo farm.⁶ Another time after returning from Texas, in 1878, James thought of being an agent for McCormick reapers between the cities of Sherman and Dallas, Texas, because he saw a great deal of opportunity there. The opportunity looked profitable and James felt that he could do the job well. He wrote to Cyrus McCormick, "I am well assured that I can make ten-fold more there (Texas) than here (Lexington) in the practice of my profession but I should be glad to be independent of that for a time and to lead a life of greater physical activity than the pursuit of the law permits."⁷ James felt also that the Texas climate would help his somewhat ailing health.

He did not secure the above job but rather received the job of Clerk for the Supreme Court of Appeals at Staunton, Virginia. James qualified as Clerk on January 20, 1883 and soon after he moved his family from Lexington to Staunton.⁸ James held this office and lived in Staunton for another ten years before he died at the Virginia Hotel in Staunton on the evening of Friday, August 4, 1893.⁹

James died long after many of his old friends had passed away; John Letcher died in 1884, Charles Davidson in 1879, and James D. Davidson in 1882. James' life after the war was much more simple and quiet. The issues that intrigued

him before the war no longer existed. The South that had emerged out of the rubble was different and foreign to James. Making an adequate living and having a quiet home life seemed to dominate the picture more. James had his time in the sun and the sun began to set after the war had ended.

James B. Dorman led an interesting life. His experiences in the Mexican War and deep involvement in Virginia politics before the Civil War are evidence of this. He, however, was a victim of either the course of history or fate. He was against secession but it came anyway. He wanted a political position after the secessionist convention but he was rejected. He wanted active participation in the South's war effort but he ~~seemed to be~~ ^{was to be} denied it. James was talented and quite intelligent and this placed him in a position of respect in society but these attributes were not able to overcome the sweeping changes that came in his time.

Summary - Footnotes

I. Manuscripts
¹Letter of James B. Dorman to Charles Davidson, September 24, 1865.

²Boney, John Letcher of Virginia, p. 223.

³Ibid., p. 228.

⁴Letter of James B. Dorman to Charles Davidson, December 15, 1870.

⁵William Couper, "Jackson Memorial Cemetary" (unpublished), p. 62.

⁶Letter of James B. Dorman to Charles Davidson, July 29, 1878.

⁷Letter of James B. Dorman to Cyrus H. McCormick, May 15, 1878.

⁸Richmond Whig, February 11, 1883.

⁹Lexington Gazette, August 10, 1893.

II. Unpublished Sources

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