

**THE LIFE OF THEODORICK
BLAND PRYOR: FIRST
MATHEMATICAL-FELLOW
OF PRINCETON COLLEGE**

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The Life of Theodorick Bland Pryor: First Mathematical-Fellow of Princeton College by
Thomas D. Suplée

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THOMAS D. SUPLÉE

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OF

Theodorick Bland Pryor

First Mathematical-Fellow of
Princeton College.

BY

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CHAPTER I.

THE BLANDS.

“ I pray you, let us satisfy ourselves,
And search revolving periods past, to look,
With recollected interest, on all
The dim memorials, and things of fame,
That do renown this ancient family.”

— *Watson.*

THE ancient homesteads which crown the banks of the James, York, Rappahannock, and other rivers of Virginia, constitute one of the most pleasing features in its scenery. They make the beholder forget the present, and carry him back into the early days of the “ Old Dominion.” These “ homes,” occupying lofty heights or peeping from embowering foliage, whose antiquated appearance is in such strong contrast with all that is modern and familiar, in some instances date back more than two hundred and fifty years.

“ The ‘ baronial ’ style of living has long since passed away with failing fortunes in the families once inhabiting these old houses ; but the houses themselves re-

main, with their wide portals, their grand staircases, their lofty ceilings, and elaborate carvings—queer old relics of the days of coaches-and six, silk stockings, hair-powder, and what is called 'aristocracy.' This term has aroused enmity in certain minds against the old Virginians; and yet they were not aristocrats in any bad sense. The feeling of class existed in the colonies then, as it existed in England; but the social prominence and importance of the landed proprietors was directly attributable to the circumstances of their position. They came over from England, generally with reduced fortunes, if not absolutely poor; but they were men of education, energy, and great intelligence; and they had the English passion for acquiring land, and attaining to 'family importance.' As land, and rich land, too, was exceedingly cheap, they succeeded with little difficulty in obtaining extensive tracts on the sole condition that they should settle it and defend it from the Indians. Then, as slaves were imported from Africa in large numbers, and indentured servants came from England, the land-holders gradually cleared large bodies of rich 'low-grounds,' as the river bottoms were called, built substantial and commodious houses—often very grand ones, like 'Rosewell,' the 'Page-house' on the York—exchanged their much-prized tobacco in London for rich furniture, costly wines, laces, silks, embroidery, books, and every object of luxury, and behold! the originally poor immigrant had become the squire, lord of the manor, and 'aristocrat.' He powdered his hair, wore silk stockings, rolled in his coach, with the family coat-of-arms

on the panel, to the rude court-house, where he sat in awful state as magistrate; or went with his brother nabobs to listen to the rector of the Established Church; attended the brilliant assemblies at 'Raleigh'; formally called on his excellency the governor; and regarded himself, perforce of wealth, position, and authority, as one of the leaders of society. There is nothing, however, to show that they were an arrogant, bad, or despotic race of men. Much remains to prove that they were just the opposite—kindly, charitable, good neighbors, and as open handed with their means as they were tenacious of their social or political privileges. They were frankly accepted as leaders and administrators of public affairs, as magistrates, burgesses, agents to England, and afterwards as deputies to Congress, governors, generals, and presidents. In these capacities they proved themselves honest, capable, energetic, not dishonoring the memories of the worthies of England from whom they were descended."

It was immediately on James River, where most of those old worthies of Virginia settled, "whose names are now the property of history," that Theodorick Bland, the earliest ancestor of Theodorick Bland Pryor, in the year 1654 purchased the estate of Westover, afterwards the home of Colonel William Byrd, "who, with his personal graces, his literary accomplishments, and his distinguished career, resembles a brilliant star set in the early skies of Virginia history." Theodorick Bland built a church, and gave to his county ten acres of land, a court-house, and a prison. He died at the age of forty-one, and was buried in the

chancel of the church which he built. The church has long ago disappeared, but a tombstone bearing the following inscription remains in the graveyard at West-over :

J. S. M.

PRUDENTE ET ERUDITI THEODORICI BLAND, ARMIG :

QUI OBIT APRILIS 23D, A. D. 1671,

ÆTATIS 41.

CUJUS VIDUA MESTISSIMA,

FILIA RICHARDI BENNET, ARMIG :

HOC MARMOR POSUIT.

Which, translated, is : Jesus, Savior of the world. The remains of the wise and learned Theodorick Bland, Esq., who died April 23d, A. D. 1671, aged 41 : whose most disconsolate widow, a daughter of Richard Bennet, Esq., erected this tomb.

This Theodorick Bland was one of the King's Council for Virginia, and was both in fortune and understanding inferior to no person of his time in the country. His father-in-law, Richard Bennet, was governor of the colony. He left three sons, Theodorick, Richard, and John.

Richard Bland married Elizabeth, daughter of Col. William Randolph of Turkey Island,* and died at "Jordan's," on James River, leaving five children—

* Thomas Jefferson was descended from Col. William Randolph of Turkey Island.