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# SAUNDERS W. COOPER.

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BY CHESTER BRADLEY JORDAN, OF LANCASTER.

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The old Nutmeg state has often been the subject of fun and ridicule but I fail to turn the pages of the history of our country in any direction that I do not find written thereon something of Connecticut men and women. I doubt if there is another state of equal population in the whole original thirteen that has contributed so much of brain and brawn to this great Union as has gone out from this little New England community of puritanic fire, notions, and habits. The flow has been incessant and yet the supply is not exhausted. The perusal of the history of that commonwealth — in fact of any commonwealth — will show what grand men that state has been sending abroad to adorn all honorable callings in the land.

The northern section of Coös and Essex counties was almost wholly settled by Connecticut people. Colebrook, Canaan (Vt.), Columbia and Stratford seemed their objective points in this region. The Prudens, Bissells, Cranes, Parsons, Terrys, De Forests, Smiths, Goddards, Pitkins, Buels, Hilliards, Inghams, Coopers, Beaches, Loomises, Thompsons, Baldwins, and others, are familiar names early impressed upon my memory. These men with their wives were strong, hardy, God-fearing, liberty-loving people, the influence of whose sturdy lives and strong characteristics is seen and felt to this day. The mind of the writer goes back to many of these as he writes, and he listens to the tales they told of their pioneer days, those early times when they were fashioning towns and states, and making

men and women. The memory of the purity of their homes, the utter simplicity of their lives, their quiet grace and dignity, and a certain quaint aristocracy which pervaded the very atmosphere in which they moved still lingers around the heart as a treasure far beyond money value.

Of such stock and lineage was Saunders W. Cooper. His grandfathers were Thomas Cooper and Nathaniel Beach. His father was Judge Jesse Cooper, late of Canaan, Vt., and his mother, Sarah Beach, sister to Deacon Beach, so long known and felt in Canaan.

The Judge was born in North Haven, Connecticut, there married, and there resided until 1798, when he and his family emigrated to Eaton, Canada. Susan Cooper, the last one living of eighteen children, sixteen of whom lived to middle life or ripe old age, says that Judge Cooper and wife walked into that town on snowshoes—he with luggage upon his back and she with her little child strapped across her shoulders. The child may have been the subject of this sketch as he also was born at North Haven, March, 1795, or possibly a younger one had supplanted him by the winter of '98. She was the first white woman in the town, and the report is by all who knew her and of her, that she was by nature, by training, and by God, endowed with intellect, refinement, force, and energy sufficient to supply not only a large family but a whole neighborhood.

Their stay in Canada was not long. We had just gained our independence, Vermont had recently been admitted to the Union, and back to Canaan came the Judge with his growing and increasing family to enjoy the liberty so dearly purchased, and the happy heritage of a large and beautiful farm on his own Connecticut river, beneath the shadows of grand old Monadnock. Here, halfway between Colebrook and Canaan villages, he took much comfort and received many honors. I remem-

ber him well in his large two-story mansion across the river, surrounded by friends and grandchildren, his hair white, his face though wrinkled yet beaming with the sunshine of contentment and gladness, dispensing a most liberal hospitality to all who came, and cheering all by the strength of his mind, the kindness and generosity of his heart. He was repeatedly called to represent his town and for many years in succession was chosen county judge. He was faithful and exemplary in all his public duties, and as faithful in his domestic and social relations. He died in 1855, aged eighty-five years.

Saunders W. Cooper early left home to carve out his own fortune. Springing from such loins it is not strange that he should grow restless at farm life and seek other fields of labor. He attended schools at Canaan, at Colebrook, and probably at Lancaster. He was an excellent product of the common school of 100 years ago. In the war of 1812, although a mere youth, we find him enlisted. We have no record, but know that he received a land-warrant and his widow a pension for his services. He found a home in Lancaster in 1812, probably with Lawyer Pearson, for he says he sat under the preaching of good old Parson Willard most of that year and became intimately acquainted with him; heard him frequently from time to time till 1820, and from 1820 to 1822 constantly, as he resided in Lancaster during that period.

He was doubtless reading law, for the records at Guildhall show he was there admitted to the bar in June, 1822. He had spent considerable time in the office of Gen. Seth Cushman at Guildhall prior to his admission, and found a safe counselor and warm friend in the General. He first opened an office at Guildhall, later in Northumberland near the Richey stand, then at Colebrook, then at Hardwick, Vt.

He came to Lancaster in 1836. In this town he formed a co-partnership with the late John S. Roby, which

was continued for some years and with fair success. He got much business out of the land speculation in 1837 and afterwards, and his docket was swelled thereby to unusual proportions. He had strong men to contend with yet held his own. He met Gov. Williams, Gen. Young, Hon. John S. Wells, Geo. Canning Williams, Esquire Fletcher, Hon. Wm. Burus, Hon. Wm. Heywood, and later Gen. Benton and other legal lights, and while not so good a lawyer as some of them, before a jury he was their equal and won as many cases as he was entitled to win. He was resourceful, metaphysical, philosophical, plausible, ingenious, adroit, when necessary, and at other times almost cruelly severe. He had such knowledge of human nature that he seemed to read the minds of witnesses and jurors, and in any kind of a trial was to be felt and feared. He knew and played upon all the strings of the human heart.

Dissolving with Mr. Roby, he united with Geo. A. Cossett, Esq., and now the firm did a large probate business—in fact, a good business of all kinds till about 1855, when Mr. Cooper's health began to fail and an incurable disease made him uneasy and often uncomfortable, still he was such an inveterate worker, his mind so active, that it was difficult for him, or any one about him, to find rest.

On the triumph of the "Allies" in Coös in 1846, Mr. Cooper was appointed county solicitor and held the office during the year that party was in power.

He attached his clients to himself by bands of steel, and for twenty years the same old fellows would be seen coming to court with Mr. Cooper, and annually leading him up a horse for pay.

The late Hon. Ossian Ray came to Mr. Cooper's office from the office of his brother, the Hon. Jesse Cooper, then of Irasburgh, Vermont, but later a judge in Kansas, and he told me of Mr. Cooper's peculiarities in his last

days of sickness and pain and how difficult it was to please him. Mr. Ray, boy-like, was sometimes not in at Mr. Cooper's bedtime. He was taken to task for it, Mr. Cooper telling him that if he must stay out late to take off his boots before going up stairs so as not to disturb him. This injunction was followed for two or three nights, when Mr. Cooper again called Mr. Ray to account, asking him what in the world he took his boots off for and went sneaking up stairs in his stocking feet like a sheep thief. The result was what Mr. Cooper anticipated — the staying in of the young man.

In looking over papers, I saw that Gov. Dale was auditor in one of Mr. Cooper's cases in 1859, and I wrote him for his views of the man as a lawyer. His answer was so full of food, so expressive of all I have heard and known of Mr. Cooper's ways, methods, and tactics in court and legal proceedings, so illustrative of his conduct and practice, that I quote it almost entire.

"I saw Mr. Cooper on only two or three occasions, and only on one that gave opportunity to study or witness any exhibition of his characteristics. I remember sitting as auditor in a case in which he was counsel for the defense. It does not seem to me to be the case you refer to; however, it was a case in which the plaintiff claimed to recover for the services of a stallion. Jacob Benton, then in his strongest time of life, stated the plaintiff's case and introduced his evidence in the most positive and impressive manner. He advanced his client's claim as a stubborn matter of fact and fortified it with positive evidence, and, as was his manner, he gave the plaintiff's case an appearance of overwhelming defiance. Then the defense began to be developed. It consisted of a variety of considerations in behalf of the defendant involving the unfortunate results of the services of the horse, a total lack of any benefit they were to defendant, a warranty and a variety of other features more or less important, and more

or less proximately or remotely connected with the case. The material for defense was of such a nature that it could be used anywhere and in every way and manner on plaintiff's case, and with it Cooper began such an ingenious process of apparently undermining, disjointing, severing and toppling down the plaintiff's structure as I never witnessed before nor since. S. W. was different from his brother Jesse; he was more spiritual, had finer mental endowments with an imagery and expression brilliant and effective, but he had at the same time a good supply of Jesse's persistency and determination, which on this occasion was backing up his burrowing, prying, scorching, and plucking in pieces the plaintiff's case.

"Benton, having introduced his evidence, sat in quiet contentment, as if in defiance if not contempt of any effort that could be made against his claims, and for some time he seemed to be indifferent to Cooper's efforts; but soon he began to be uneasy, seeing Cooper in a suave yet curious, inquisitive, and incisive manner enter every apartment of his case and freely examine the utensils with which he constructed it, and even use them for its demolition. But the climax of ingenuity was reached when Cooper came to his argument of the case in reply to a blunt, forceful and apparently irrefragable statement of plaintiff's case by Benton. The situation bordered on the ridiculous, the subject-matter of the controversy was so dry, so common, so uninteresting, and the ingenuity of the advocate so full of sharp, penetrating finesse, and all of such remarkable quality and quick conception. And to add to this feature of the occasion, the proceedings were made sadly zestful by allusions to the defendant's poverty.

"On the apparent ruins of the plaintiff's case Cooper spent an hour or more in erecting his skilful structure of fallacies so arranged as to conceal its fanciful parts and make it seem a reality. Mr. Cooper was feeble and was



obliged to remain seated during his talk, and to request a recess from which he returned reinforced with designs and effectiveness. He built up his argument with such structural nicety and exactness as to make it appear perfect. He balanced each block as he placed it so that it would reach as far over the line as possible without toppling down his work. He fitted a statement of a want of consideration or benefit to the defendant into his claim of a warranty, and of an element of warranty into a want of consideration, and used both for pathetic purposes with such eloquent ingenuity and adroitness that the fallacies could be much more easily seen by the mind's eye than they could be expressed or pointed out. This, of course, stung Benton almost to madness. He saw that his strong common-sense methods of reasoning were not adapted to expose or disarrange the complications by which his case was surrounded, and through which they articulated. Ray, who took no active part in the trial, was present, beaming with that enthusiastic interest which such a display of forensic ingenuity would naturally stir within him. This added to Mr. Benton's annoyance, and he, mistaking the auditor's admiration for the skill and ingenuity of the advocate for conviction, revoked an agreement that the report should be final."

As a politician Mr. Cooper was an ardent abolitionist up to the date of the time of the forming of the Republican party, and wrote much on the subject. Copies of speeches upon speeches on the topic of slavery and upon slaveholders lie before me. In discussing the matter he ranged the whole gamut from Adam to the then present time. He advanced arguments human and divine, from God and from man, reason, philanthropy, and the Bible to show the cruelty of the system. He also wrote voluminously for the press on the same theme. He worked, he talked, he wrote, he fought, against what he rightly termed "the blighting curse." He lived to



see it wiped out — the fulfilment of his heart's desire — in the grand march of events of the great Civil War, and the eternal decrees of the Almighty and Abraham Lincoln.

On the formation of the Republican party he became and remained as intense a Republican as he had been abolitionist.

But other themes occupied his attention and pen. He was a controversialist by nature, a born fighter in law, politics, religion and the social problems of the hour. He took delight in educating and disciplining those who didn't agree with him. He wrote much upon religion, and, although not a member of any denomination, he was attendant upon the Congregational church and services, and loyal to his espousal. He was ever ready to take up the cudgel and wield it stoutly against all sin and sinners; and all were sinners who didn't see and believe as he saw and believed.

As a specimen of his style of writing, I will give an extract from one of his letters written July 22, 1863. His brother Nat., the wallet-maker, had reported to him that Mr. — had said that he, S. W., and his father, the judge, were "tories." . . .

"Had this political controversy been with me instead of with my brother, or had anything I had done or said derogatory of you been developed, I probably should have felt differently, so far as I was personally concerned, but that even would have been no excuse for an attack upon the venerable dead. So long as neither myself nor father had any necessary connection in the controversy (with Nat.) and neither being present, neither having ever given any provocation for it, it was not only cowardly, but a fair specimen of Democratic slander and detraction, and very like the old story concocted by old Jennett, and told in every neighborhood, of Mr. So-and-So, a leading Federalist: That he had said, and another Mr. So-and-So heard

him, that it never would be good times until laboring men were compelled to work for a sheep's head and pluck a day. . . .

"The venerable dead whom you so foully slander belonged to the party of Washington, Hamilton, Hancock, and other patriots of the Revolution—the fathers of our country; in short, the Federal party, which was desirous of avoiding entanglements with other nations; of disseminating virtue, morality, learning, religion, and equal rights to all; of cultivating the arts of peace;—a party of progress in the arts of civilization, national prosperity, and human greatness; a party the appeal of whose leaders was addressed to the intelligence, the judgment, the virtue and morality of the masses. You were educated in and legitimately belonged to the same party until, for motives of policy, you found it convenient to apostatize and attach yourself to a party which originated in sin and black ingratitude, of which party an unprincipled, talented, highly educated French political disciplinarian was the originator and former leader. His appeals were to the jealousies of the masses, their prejudices, their ambition, their hatred, and all the worser passions of the human mind," and so on and on.

The foregoing is enough to show his trenchant style, his power of invective, and his readiness to enter the arena on any supposed provocation.

Another long article is before me, written for the *Coös Republican*, in vindication of the fame and character of Parson Willard, who for more than a quarter of a century has slept the sleep that knows no earthly waking. Some one had said that the good parson, about the year 1800, had countenanced the dipping in the river, in dead winter, of two Methodist itinerant preachers. Mr. Cooper felt it his duty to refute the story, and so rushed into print. A son of Parson Willard, John Haven Willard, married Mr. Cooper's sister, Beede, and this relationship may have added zeal and zest to the conflict.

Mr. Cooper was married, in 1843, to Miss Mary Porter, daughter of Warren Porter, of Lancaster, and from then to his death found every needed attention at his home on Elm street. His fireside was much sought, and his companionship about it was genial, hospitable, and profitable to all within the home circle. He was of scholarly habits, chaste and refined in his speech, warmly attached to his books and friends. He had no room or toleration for his enemies. He was a fine looking man, and in public always elegantly attired. His blue coat and bright buttons are still remembered.

He was interested in schools and devoted to the welfare and well-being of children. He loved boys and girls with an ever-increasing fondness and passion, and no matter how tortured and racked with pain, the dear children would not fail to dispel the gloom and usher in the glad sunshine of hope, joy, and good cheer. Providence failed to send him any of his own, but his heart was warmed and life brightened by the constant visits of his little nephews and nieces and his neighbors' children. To the little ones of his brothers and sisters he wrote sweet, lovely, useful letters, some of which they treasure to the present time.

We must conclude that the nature that invariably exhibited such warmth to the little ones, the helpless and unfortunate, possessed much of good, and that the petulant, the irascible manifestations to older ones were due to extraneous causes. For eleven years before his death he had an incurable, a most painful disease. Daily he walked hand in hand with the black angel who was surely leading him by tortuous and torturing ways through troublous days and sleepless nights to certain death. Who of us will say it is pleasant to be kept constantly in his own shadow, and to daily gaze through the ever widening doors of the great hereafter?

Thus afflicted our brother struggled on until November, 1865, when he welcomed a surcease from life's pains, toils,

and endeavors. The beauties and glories of the autumnal tints upon the everlasting hills begirting his town and home; the lovely landscape spread out before him in rich profusion to rest the eye and soothe the troubled soul; the sweet, soft murmur of two rivers in their onward course past him to the sea, and the kind ministrations of dearest friends could afford only temporary relief. The hush of eternal night, the long-sought rest, came at last, and our friend was no more save a memory. He was buried from his late home on November 28, and the bar of the county attended the funeral in a body.