

An Early Family

"Much Given To Literature"

By A. S. Salley

WHEN Columbia's poet, the late J. Gordon Coogler, wrote those famous lines,

"Alas! for the South, her books have grown fewer—

She never was much given to literature,"

he didn't know any more about the

matter than some writers who are credited with being scholars. There was once a family in Charleston that "was much given to literature." The founder of that family was Robert Wells, a Scotchman, who settled in Charles Town about the middle of the eighteenth century and on the 2nd of No-

vember, 1758, he began the publication of a gazette which was at first called "The South Carolina weekly Gazette," (with a lower case w, as if to describe) but, with the issue for April 4, 1764, was renamed "The South Carolina and American General Gazette." The reader was informed that it "was circulated in all the provinces of South Carolina, North Carolina, Georgia, East Florida, and West Florida, and sent to every place of note on the British American continent and to all the islands, also to Great Britain and other parts of Europe, so that advertisements published in it have a very general as well as steady circulation."

With the issue for January 6, 1775, John Wells, Jr., who was born July 2, 1752, appeared as a member of the printing firm and thereafter the paper was "Printed by R. Wells and Son, for Robert Wells, at the Old Printing House, Great Stationary & Book Store," until the issue of May 12, following, where the clause, "for Robert Wells," was dropped from the notice.

On November 13, 1777, Robert Wells, being hostile to the American Revolution, retired from the paper and left Charles Town. The paper was published thereafter by John Wells, Jr., until March 3, 1781, when, Charles Town being in the hands of the British, the elder Wells returned and resumed his former position in the firm, the announcement running: "R. Wells & Son, Printers to the King's Most Excellent Majesty." The name of the paper was changed to "The Royal Gazette." When the British evacuated Charles Town in December, 1782, the Wellises also departed. John Wells, Jr., went to St. Augustine, Florida, where

he conducted "The East Florida Gazette" from February 1, 1783, to May, 1784, and issued two volumes bearing Florida imprints.

William Charles Wells, second son

of Robert, was born in Charles Town in 1757. He joined his brother John in St. Augustine at the beginning of 1783, and in a memoir of himself, which was published after his death, he says: "Immediately afterwards, I began to publish a weekly newspaper in my brother's name; the first thing of the kind ever attempted in that country." He had studied medicine at the University of Edinburgh, 1775-1778, and in 1785 began practice in London. In 1792 he published in London an "Essay on Single Vision with Two Eyes," which was highly praised. In 1814 he brought out in London "An Essay on Dew." He died in London, September 18, 1817, and an obituary in "The Gentleman's Magazine" soon after was appreciative. In 1818 his two essays were published in one volume, prefaced by the memoir which he had written several years before. It went through several later additions in London; one as late as 1866. The writer possesses a copy of an edition published in Philadelphia in 1838.

Louisa Susannah, a daughter of Robert Wells, born in Charles Town, November 18, 1755, left for London in 1778, and in 1779 she wrote "From memory only" "The Journal of a Voyage from Charles Town, S. C., to London." This lady was married, January 14, 1782, to Alexander Aikman, printer to the House of Assembly and King's Printer, Jamaica, W. I., and the manuscript of her journal remained in the hands of descendants until 1906, when Mr. W. G. Aikman, of Glasgow, Scotland, permitted it to be published by the New York Historical Society.

Helena, another daughter of Robert Wells, was the author of several books. There were two novels, "The Stepmother" in two volumes, London, 1778, and "Constantia Neville; or The West Indian," three volumes, 1800. Two other works appear to have been in the interest of her sex. They were "Letters for Young Females, 12 mo., 1799, and "Thoughts on an Institution for Impoverished Females, 8 vo., 1809.

Louisa Susannah (Wells) Aikman who in 1779 wrote "from memory only" The Journal of a Voyage from Charles Town, S. C., to London.



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