

William Gibbons.

THE Honorable Thomas Spalding, then far advanced in years, in 1850 thus narrates his recollections of the subject of this sketch: "Mr. Gibbons was my law instructor. After my own father he was the best friend I ever knew. He was a great lawyer, well read in his profession, which he acquired in Charleston under the direction of a Mr. Parsons—an Irish gentleman of high grade in the law. The result from his professional labors while I lived with him was three thousand pounds sterling a year. This I knew, as I was his collector and Mrs. Gibbons his treasurer. There was then no bank paper. His note-book was to him of great value, for he had distinctly noted every important case that had occurred during his whole practice, giving the points on which it turned and the opinion of the judge; and as these judges in those times were Judge Walton, of Augusta, and Judge Houstoun, of Savannah, these decisions carried more weight with the jury than the decisions of the King's Bench.

"Mr. Gibbons was not a very fluent speaker. He was very quick in discovering the weak point of his opponent, and his memory was always ready to give the law that bore upon it. His commentary upon the law was in short, clear, distinct terms, very pointed; and sometimes he indulged in witticisms, which increased as he grew older from his intimate association with Peter Carnes the elder—the wittiest lawyer I ever have known, and whose wit obscured his profound law knowledge in the eyes of the many. Mr. Gibbons in his nature was very open, frank, and manly, and very determined. This gave him a few warm friends and many bitter enemies.

"It gives me pleasure to state that General James Jackson, the noblest man with whom it has been my lot to be acquainted, when I called upon him as Governor to give me a letter to Mr. King, our then minister in London, kept me to dine with him; and he asked me what were Mr. Gibbons' receipts from his profession? I replied: 'Three thousand pounds per annum.' His response was: 'My own were about that amount when I unwisely left my profession for politics. Mr. Gibbons, as a whole, was the greatest lawyer in Georgia.' Let me say to you that General Jackson and Mr. Gibbons had exchanged three shots at each other; they were considered the bitterest enemies by the public. A high-minded man feels no enmity."

Mr. Gibbons was a gentleman of large wealth, accumulated, it is believed, by judicious investment of his professional income. It was upon one of his rice plantations, situated not far from "Mulberry Grove" on the Savannah River, and while as the guest of Mr. Gibbons inspecting his growing crop, that General Nathanael Greene, on the 13th of June, 1786, contracted the illness which so speedily terminated his valuable life. His residence in Savannah was noted for its comfort and bountiful hospitality. It was the day of rich brown sherry, Madeira wine and good brandy.

Upon another of Mr. Gibbons' plantations General Wayne, in June, 1782, met and overcome the famous Indian Chief Guristersigo.

While intent upon the practice of his profession and busied with his private affairs, he was not indifferent to the claims of country or an idle spectator of passing events. His sympathies at the outset were cordially enlisted on the side of the "Sons of Liberty," and his time and services were cheerfully given to furthering the aims of the rebels.

He was one of the party which, during the night of the 11th of May, 1775, broke open the magazine in Savannah and removed therefrom some six hundred pounds of the King's powder, to be exploded not in the honor, but in defiance of his Majesty.

In the Provincial Congress of July, 1775, he appeared as a delegate from the district of Acton, and was a member of the committee raised to acquaint the president of the Continental Congress with the proceedings of the Georgia Congress.

Of the Council of Safety selected on the 11th of the following December he was chosen a member. It was by direction of this council that Governor Wright was arrested and confined. So far as we can learn, Mr. Gibbons never bore arms during the struggle, but he was almost continuously in the civil service of the commonwealth. Of that Executive or Supreme Council which, in July, 1779, was invested with extraordinary powers, he was an active member.

Aside from the distinction of representing Georgia in the Continental Congress he was complimented in 1786 with the position of Associate Justice of the county of Chatham; in the following year with the speakership of the House of Representatives; and in 1789 with the presidency of the constitutional convention. The act of a formal acceptance, by Governor Walton, from Mr. Gibbons of the new Constitution concluded upon by that convention in Augusta on the 6th of May, was announced to the town by a salute of eleven guns.

Mr. Gibbons died in Savannah in 1800. His will bears date the 14th of June, 1799, and was admitted to probate on the 26th of November in the following year. It is now of record in the office of the ordinary of Chatham county, Georgia.

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