Written by **Alias** on June 30, 2013

An American Family and the Civil War

The Rev. Dr. George Junkin was among the first to arrive on the great and terrible field of carnage and destruction that was 1863 Gettysburg. Tens of thousands of America's bravest sons had fallen the previous three days during events now consecrated in the national memory — Cemetery Ridge, Little Round Top, Devil's Den, the Peach Orchard, and Pickett's Charge. The turning point of Americans' epic war with themselves, history would call Gettysburg. Junkin possessed a closer connection to what some would cite as a more crucial event that occurred two months earlier.

It had been a long time since he sat at the head of the table of one of the most interesting American families ever to gather for supper. While president of Washington College (now Washington and Lee University) in Lexington, Virginia, from 1848-1861, he could often look around the table and see his sons John, George Jr., Ebenezer, and William; his daughters Maggie, Ellie, and Julia; his brother David and that man's son George G.; and his sons-in-law John Preston (co-founder of Lexington's Virginia Military Institute or VMI) and Tom Jackson, as well as Preston's son (and Maggie's stepson) Willy. Junkin and his own children were Pennsylvania-born-and-raised.

Junkin shined as a lionheart of spirit and learning, and was renowned nationally in educational and Presbyterian circles. He became a close friend, spiritual mentor, and surrogate father to Tom Jackson — an eccentric professor at VMI — even before romance blossomed between the orphaned young man and Junkin's beautiful and winsome daughter Ellie. The two men shared a fervent adherence to the Reformed theological doctrines of sovereign grace espoused by John Calvin, Jonathan Edwards, and others. These teachings emphasized a high view of God, a keen sense of the depravity and need of humankind, the abiding necessity of the Lordship of Christ over every facet of a person's life at all times, and a preeminent trust that "All [not just most, some, or good] things work together for good for those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose."

Of all the Christians great and small whom Junkin had known in his long and extensive service and leadership in Christ's church and academia, he declared he had never known a more devout person than Tom Jackson. The younger man gave him what would prove perhaps the most precious gift of his life, a gold-headed cane. The two delighted in marathon theological discussions, along with Junkin's sons, some of whom anticipated serving in the ministry. "My dear son," Junkin called Tom after the latter wed Ellie, with all the love an older man could have for a son, even as Tom's heart brimmed over with the love of an orphaned younger man for a father.

One can almost hear Junkin nodding happily and declaring, "This is my beloved son, in whom I am well pleased" when Tom told him and the family:

> I have so fixed the habit in my own mind, that I never raise a glass of water to my lips without a moment's asking of God's blessing. I never seal a letter without putting a word of prayer under the

> seal. I never take a letter from the post without a brief sending of my thoughts heavenward. I never change my classes in the section room without a minute's petition on the cadets who go out and those who come in.

As has been said, though, "The testimony is always followed by the test." After only a year of marriage, Jackson's wife and Junkin's daughter Ellie died with her baby in childbirth. It was the most devastating blow of Tom's often-tragic life. For months, he prayed for God to take him, too. In an era of high infant mortality and modest life span, when hymns notably beckoned the singer toward the next world and not primarily a betterment of the present one, this and other grievous losses knit the extended Junkin family tighter together.

Junkin's minister brother David was very close to both Ellie and Tom. He wrote the latter a heartfelt letter of condolence, for which Jackson thanked his "Dear Uncle." The bond between Junkin and Jackson deepened, as well as the younger man's trust in his father-in-law, to whom he wrote: "I cannot realize that Ellie is gone; that my wife will no more cheer the rugged and dark way of life.... But one upward glance of the eye of faith, gives a return that all is well, and that I can do all things through Christ that strengthens me."

So, especially, did Maggie and Tom's relationship grow, apparently deepening to romantic love. A later-expunged article of Presbyterian doctrine, however, prohibited the marriage of a man to his deceased wife's sister. In a rare devotion to God over extreme personal desire, they declined to pursue their feelings. Maggie took an extended European trip. Having rebuffed scores of suitors over a nearly two-decade period, she married Preston within weeks of Tom's second wedding, in 1857.

Junkin's influence on Jackson in large ways and small endured through the years. In 1859, Tom wrote his second wife while she was away about the impact a Junkin sermon had made on him: "No affliction for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous, nevertheless afterward, it yieldeth the peaceable fruits of righteousness to them who are exercised thereby."

Of all the Junkin children, Maggie, the eldest, shared the closest bond with her father. A tiny, scarlet-trussed spitfire, she grew more like him than any of her siblings. She shared her father's brilliant mind, relentless thirst for learning, passionate partisanship toward causes she believed just, and single-minded devotion to God. Despite his awe-inspiring responsibilities, he spent as much time with her as he could, from childhood to womanhood. He taught her Latin, the classics, and theology. She drank up his powerful sermons, calling them "what most I loved to hear/the *sweetness* of a Father's tone."

As the years passed, Junkin and Maggie loved and stood up for one another through countless personal, familial, and professional crises generated by his high public visibility, their hot-blooded temperaments, and the tumultuous times in which they lived. His investment in her life flowered into her own voice as a published poet, despite her many other duties and the hostility of society toward female scribes.

Union vs. Secession

As sectional discord escalated over slavery, the nature of federal government, secession, the tariff and economics, even religion and culture, Virginia sat precariously bounding North and South, and adjacent to the national capital in Washington, D.C. Even after Abraham Lincoln won the multi-candidate 1860 election as president with only 39 percent of the popular vote — even after seven Deep South states seceded from the Union — the majority in Shenandoah Valley Lexington remained staunchly Unionist, rejecting a chorus of secession calls from across the South.

Junkin believed the American Union of states to be a divine compact ordained by the Lord Himself,

designed to help accomplish His purposes among the nations. “God Almighty can’t do without this United States government in His work of evangelizing the world, and he won’t let you break it up!” he thundered from a Lexington pulpit. Tearing it asunder, he warned, would bring forth the wrath of God. Decades later, Maggie’s stepdaughter still bristled with anger over Junkin’s tirades about the issue against her father, Preston, “in his own house.”

He broadcast forth his views publicly and relentlessly:

> UNION was always the master-thought in the minds of American patriots…. UNION was the basis of all their actions…. Without UNION there could be no *freedom*, no *national government*, no *independence*…. There never existed a State sovereignty; the supreme power is in the States UNITED: no State ever declared itself an independent nation — none was ever recognized by any power on earth as an independent sovereignty; the doctrine of State rights, or State sovereignty, outside of the limits of State constitutions and the lines of demarcation fixed in the United States Constitution, is necessarily subversive of the national government.

Those around the table who differed with Junkin’s views abstained from challenging him out of respect for his age and his exalted familial, academic, and ecclesiastical stations. However, many others addressed his arguments. That the individual states sovereignly existed prior to their Union stood *prima facie* to many; a majority of them had individually to ratify the Constitution before it took effect for any of them. Three of them — two in New England — declared in their written ratifications that if ever the rights they granted to the Union were misused to their harm by the federal government or the other states, it was proper for the offended state to resume its right of self-governance and withdraw from that Union.

Both Anti-Federalist Thomas Jefferson and Federalist James Madison made numerous declarations regarding the authority of the individual states to safeguard their interests, even against the national government. In the Treaty of Peace ending the American War of Independence, Britain addressed the individual “free, sovereign and independent States (and) treats with them as such.” Five times, combinations of *New England* states threatened to secede over issues, including the Louisiana Purchase, the War of 1812, and the statehood of Texas. Even Lincoln had declared as a U.S. congressman: “Any people anywhere … have the right to rise up and shake off the existing government and form a new one that suits them better.”

So Junkin had his convictions and so did his opponents. As so often with Americans, Christians, and the combination of the two, whoever had the most guns would be “right.”

One topic that spawned less controversy around the family table was slavery. Numerous among the family, including Maggie and Preston and led by Junkin, favored deporting African-American slaves back to the continent of their origin. President Lincoln shared this view. They believed it more humane for blacks and beneficial for whites. No one at the table had any more interest than the vast majority of Americans North or South in abolition and its immediate loosing of millions of ill-prepared blacks into American society and bankrupting untold numbers of slaveholders.

“If the general government should persist in the measures now threatened, there must be war,” Tom, a deacon in his Presbyterian church and decorated Mexican War veteran, said to his pastor. “They seem not to know what its horrors are. I have had an opportunity of knowing enough on the subject, to make me fear war as the sum of all evils.”

He harbored different hopes, however: “But do you not think that all the Christian people of the land

could be induced to unite in a concert of prayer, to avert so great an evil? It seems to me, that if they would unite thus in prayer, war might be prevented, and peace preserved."

Correspondence and entreaties indeed flowed between Christians, including Jackson, and churches North and South. President James Buchanan of Pennsylvania, who did not support secession but recognized no constitutional sanction for preventing it, especially by a terrific contest of arms, established January 4, 1861 as a National Day of Fasting and Prayer.

"I am looking forward with great interest to the 4th of January," Tom said, "when the Christian people of this land will lift their united prayer as incense to the Throne of God in supplication for our unhappy country." It was, however, a nation whose people had strode with boldness, courage, and ingenuity across a continent and more than two centuries with a Bible in one hand and a rifle in the other.

War Divides Family

Saturday, April 13, was a big day in Lexington. Shoppers, VMI cadets on liberty, and farmers with their produce filled the small Upper Shenandoah town. When Unionist militia and cadets — some of the latter from seceded states — gave pro-Federal and pro-Confederate speeches, then jostled to raise their own flags, tempers flared. By the time most of the cadets returned to their dormitory, matters seemed to have calmed. Then one frantic youth returned late from town, shouting (incorrectly) that militia had killed some cadets.

Nearly 200 cadets charged back down the hill into town with muskets and bayonets, dismissing orders to halt, and formed ranks on one end of Main Street. A large crowd of armed Unionists did the same at the other end of the street. As a mini-civil war prepared to break out between friends, family, and acquaintances, Tom appeared. Offering few words if any, his blazing countenance cowed the cadets into retreating back to campus.

Fort Sumter fell the same day, but the Virginians did not even know it. They did by the time word reached Lexington three days later that Lincoln had called forth militia from every state remaining in the Union, including Virginia, to invade the seceding section and force its acquiescence. The temper of loyal Unionists throughout the Border States transformed into raging defiance. It was Virginia's "second declaration of independence and she will make it good," a Lexington newspaper roared.

Over at the town's other campus, Washington College students raised a Confederate flag atop a wooden statue of George Washington, whose sacrificial financial donation had saved the college. Junkin ordered them to bring it down, shouting, "So perish all efforts to dissolve this glorious Union," and set fire to it. The students snatched it off the ground, stanched the fire, then cut it into pieces they placed in the buttonholes of their jackets. The next day, another flag appeared. This time, the students rejected Junkin's angry orders to lower it. Someone launched a chorus of "Dixie."

As the crowd mushroomed and the tension mounted, Willy, only 16 years old but already a leader among the college cadets and one of the raisers of the flag, stepped forward. "Boys, Dr. Junkin is right," he announced, startling the throng. "Virginia is still in the Union and he (Lincoln) is still our President. We must wait a few days, and I'm going to take the flag down."

When he shinnied up to remove the banner, some in the crowd hooted catcalls. Others slung bottles and bricks. Willy persevered, took the flag down, then waved it and called for three cheers for the Confederacy, which resounded across the college grounds. When Virginia voted to leave the Union, yet another Confederate banner rose. The Washington College faculty refused to demand this one be lowered. Junkin resigned.

A scene of profound elegy followed as the 71-year-old Junkin loaded a few possessions, widowed daughter Julia, and her daughter into a new rockaway, and drove north across the Potomac and out of Virginia forever. Sons John and George, Jr. already lived in the North. "I am escaping from a set of lunatics!" he raged. "Lexington is one vast mad-house. There is not a sane man there, nor woman.... (Tom) is the best and bravest man I ever knew, but he is as crazy as the rest." Well knowing Tom Jackson's determination of character, as well as what might lie ahead in an unprecedented war among the American people, Junkin somberly told the younger man he would not survive the coming conflict.

As soon as Junkin crossed the river, he climbed down, took his handkerchief, and wiped the dirt of the Old Dominion from his feet and carriage wheels. Junkin's own words of himself memorably recounted the experience of leaving Virginia: "There he had made the sacred (burial), first, of one (his wife) who had sojourned by his side for almost thirty-five years; then of his second daughter ... then of a noble and beloved son-in-law; then of the lovely boy who soon followed his father to the grave."

"In Lexington," his brother David wrote, "beautiful, picturesque, and healthful — near to the ashes of his dead, and surrounded by so many surviving dear ones, he had hoped to spend the evening of his days.... It was a crushing trial, and a heavy sacrifice; and all the more so to a heart like his."

Left behind were all the Junkins who had married into Southern families and given their hearts to Virginia: Maggie with her husband Preston, along with three stepsons (including Willy), a stepdaughter, and two children of their own; Presbyterian minister Ebenezer; and William, also a Presbyterian minister, who would not only serve as a Confederate chaplain, but raise a company of Confederate infantry and serve as its captain. Also, Tom Jackson, soon commissioned a colonel in the Confederate army, under whom Willy would serve; and George G., an aide and scout for Jackson, and whose father David would serve as a *Union* chaplain.

Jackson deplored the conflagration. He maintained that patriotic statesmanship could have averted it. Junkin deplored it too, and managed to get brother David sent through the lines to Harper's Ferry the next month to urge his "dear son" and David's son George G. to depart from a cause he considered no less than "the essence of all immorality." For two hours, David pleaded with Tom and George G., who both respectfully listened, Tom occasionally asking a question. Northerners and Southerners could still work together, David urged, slavery would end peacefully given time, and disunion would spawn "wars of a hundred generations in America."

"As a Christian man," David recalled Tom responding at the end, "my first allegiance is to my State ... Virginia; and every other State has a primal claim to the fealty of her citizens, and they may justly control their allegiance. If Virginia adheres to the United States, I adhere. Her determination must control mine."

George G. told his own father the same thing.

There was nothing more to say. Tom extended his hand to David, who shook it. "Farewell," his uncle said. "May we meet under happier circumstances; if not in this troubled world, may we meet in — " At this point, as tears streamed down the cheeks of both men, David's throat choked and he could say no more.

Jackson raised his gauntleted hand, pointed upward, and finished his kinsman's sentence with, "In heaven!"

Two months later, Maggie and the others who remained in Lexington heard the booms of cannon echoing across the hills from the war's first great battle at Manassas/Bull Run, a hundred miles

northeast. Cheered on from a nearby ridge by thousands of picnicking pro-Federal civilians, including senators, congressmen, and governors, the Yankees were in the process of sweeping the Confederates from the bloody field. Then an eccentric, newly promoted Southern brigadier named Thomas Jackson, shot in the hand and his horse shot, determined to stand with his Virginians where they were against a climactic Federal charge. They did, the momentum of the entire battle — and war — turned, and the Confederates eventually drove their panicked foe to the gates of Washington more than 20 miles away.

Thus did Tom Jackson become known to history as Thomas "Stonewall" Jackson.

The smashing Confederate triumph stunned the United States and set the stage for a catastrophic four-year bloodbath that hardly anyone expected. Sadly for the extended Junkin family and many others, much of the holocaust unfolded in Virginia. Even before it devastated them, Maggie wrote in the spring of 1862, "I loathe the word — *War*. It is destroying and paralyzing all before it. If we might only be permitted to withdraw ourselves from this turmoil of horrid strife — if it were only to a log cabin on some mountain side."

She may not even have known that David's son (and Tom's aide) George G. had already been captured at Kernstown and thrown into a Yankee prison. A few weeks later, her stepson Frank lost an arm at Winchester. Two months after that, his brother Willy, who had provided valuable service to Tom, died at the Second Battle of Manassas/Bull Run. That fight was the latest in a growing series of epic triumphs led by Jackson, whose reputation now reached throughout the globe.

It provided no consolation to a shattered family. Maggie, the war already wearing down her tiny frame, poured her grief onto the written page. She eventually had only rusty nails dipped in persimmon juice to write with on used wrapping paper. Then, the war's stresses and a lack of lighting fuel gradually blinding her, she had to dictate to her stepdaughter. "The worst has happened," she wrote. "Willy, the gentle, tender-hearted, brave boy, lies in a soldier's grave on the Plains of Manassas.… I did not know how I loved (him). My heart is wrung with grief to think that his sweet face, his genial smile, his sympathetic heart are gone."

When Preston found his son's body wrapped in a blanket, Willy's "despoiled face" was unrecognizable. When he sought a lock of hair as a keepsake, "it crumbled to the touch." The blow broke his heart, quieted his already-dignified personality for the remainder of his life, and turned his hair white.

"He was an ardent Union man — a devoted student, pure-minded as the blood of sprinkling ever cleanses sinners here below," a sorrowing Junkin wrote of Willy. "A nobler boy never took seat before me in class, during the thirty-one years of my presidency in colleges." He remembered others of his "dearly beloved young friends" who had already fallen, and raged, "Oh, ye conspirators against our glorious Union and the peace of the world, look at the slaughter you have brought about, and think of the dread tribunal of Eternal Justice!"

In December 1862, Junkin sent his son John, a surgeon in the Federal army, through the lines at Fredericksburg to Tom, with a copy of *Political Heresies*, which detailed the roster of crimes against God the old lion attributed to the South. "I expect it is well-named," Tom told the aide who opened the package. "That's just what the book contains: political heresies."

The name Fredericksburg electrified the world, another triumph of the awe-inspiring combination of Thomas Jackson and his superior, Army of Northern Virginia Commander Robert E. Lee. The greater the Confederacy's military accomplishments, however, the dearer the cost of them. Another of Maggie's stepsons, 17-year-old VMI cadet Randy, died of typhoid fever. She wrote of waiting in vain for a footfall

that would never return, and yearning for "that deaf face … hidden cold under the clay." She and her family did not even observe Christmas in 1862; they kept to themselves in separate rooms.

In a remarkable American paradox, even as Jackson exterminated U.S. soldiery at Fredericksburg, the Valley Campaign, and elsewhere on a scale rarely matched in the nation's history, he spearheaded one of its greatest religious revivals, in the Southern armies. Now a decorated, battle-hardened veteran of two wars, he surrounded himself with theologically astute aides such as Robert L. Dabney who could both sharpen his own spiritual understanding and carry forth his strategy for evangelizing and discipling Confederate troops.

He called for ministers and chaplains from every Christian denomination to preach to and shepherd his men. He promoted regular worship services in the field, discouraged the imbibing of alcohol, encouraged the construction of regimental chapels, eschewed profanity, and personally distributed gospel tracts to soldiers. Thousands of men, amidst the lamentable life of wartime military camps, trusted in Christ both for their earthly lives and their eternal salvation.

Road to Gettysburg

Family tragedy multiplied in May 1863. Executing a brilliant flanking maneuver, Jackson routed the main Federal army at Chancellorsville. If not for his inability to communicate his next move, he would likely have bagged the entire Union host, the largest military force ever assembled on the North American continent. Chancellorsville proved the apex of Confederate fortunes. The world's greatest military commanders — American, Russian, German — would emulate Jackson's tactics to the present day.

Winston Churchill described how the colossal victory became an even greater loss for the Confederacy: "[Jackson] was within half a mile of the road leading to United States Ford, the sole line of retreat for Hooker's whole army, and between him and this deadly thrust no organised force intervened. He selected the point.… The prize was nothing less than the destruction of the main Federal Army.… All this he saw."

The Confederates had advanced so far so quickly, however, that as Tom returned to the main lines in the moonlight to issue his orders, some of his men thought he and his aides must be Federals, and loosed a volley of fire on them. He was hit three times, the staff officer who was to implement the plan killed. Tom himself would die 10 days later from pneumonia. "No one knew Jackson's plan, and he was now unconscious," Churchill concluded, recounting how the Confederates still garnered a huge victory, but not the one that might have changed history. "Thus on small agate points do the balances of the world turn."

"There has been the severest struggle in my breast between two conflicting emotions," David wrote to Junkin upon learning the news, "my love of country and my love for your noble, dear, godly, but misguided, and now dead, son, General Jackson. I knew not fully how much I loved him, despite his zeal in a bad cause.… I have never for a day forgotten your emphatic prediction, uttered in a mournful tone, more than two years ago, 'Jackson will perish in this war.'.… I sought my state-room, to weep there. Is it wrong, is it treason, to mourn for a good and great, though a mistaken, man? I cannot feel it to be so. I loved him dearly — but now — he is with *dear, dear* Ellie and the rest!… God comfort *thee*, my brother; I know He will."

Maggie had gained increasing acclaim through the first couple years of war with stirring poems like "Acceptation" and "The Bivouac in the Snow." As one beloved after another fell, her mourning birthed

the beginnings of her greatest work, *Beechenbrook*. An epic poem of the war, its inspiring and heartbreaking verse would stretch more than 75 pages and carry her renown throughout the South and North and even across the world as "The Poetess of the Confederacy." Decades later, when Henry Wadsworth Longfellow compiled his monumental *Poems of America*, he asked Maggie's permission to include three of hers.

For now, she wrote in her diary of Tom, "In his last letter to me he spoke of our precious Ellie, and of the blessedness of being with her in heaven. And now he has rejoined her, and together they unite in ascribing praises to Him who has redeemed them by His blood."

Junkin's son, Presbyterian minister, and Confederate Captain William gave a eulogy and the final prayer at Jackson's funeral.

Only weeks later, Lee and his heretofore unstoppable Army of Northern Virginia thundered north into Pennsylvania. But he no longer had Thomas Jackson, his indispensable partner and "right arm." Few of Lee's other key subordinates, several of them inheriting greater responsibilities in Jackson's absence, performed up to their usual standards either, without "Stonewall's" leadership. The selfless sacrifice and valor of which the sons of America are capable when defending what they believe to be right abounded on both sides. After a three-day marathon of slaughter that claimed more than 50,000 casualties, Lee headed for home without victory. The Confederacy's doom, stamped with a wild burst of fire at Chancellorsville, was now sealed.

As the eighth and final decade of Junkin's life passed and he experienced separation from so many loved ones, and the permanent loss of many of them, compassion filled his heart. He parlayed his knowledge of and zeal for God, and his keen familiarity with scores of Southerners, including many to whom the war brought fame, into an inspiring, unusually Christ-like ministry.

Not only did he preach hundreds of sermons from pulpits around Pennsylvania and beyond, he visited Federal troop camps, battlefields, and hospitals housing wounded soldiers. And he spent days, sometimes weeks, amongst *Confederate* prisoners in Northern prisons. Many of his younger pastoral colleagues flagged from such physically and emotionally exhausting service, but Junkin persevered.

David recalled later how "peculiarly happy" his brother was in these labors, "especially when he came in contact with his erring brethren from the South." Junkin walked with the gold-headed cane given him by Tom years before. He used it as a conversation starter about Stonewall Jackson, then religion. In a remarkable providence of "What men meant for evil, God meant for good," the Southrons' hearts were as drawn to him as his was to them. He visited with them, prayed with them, and sought to fulfill their requests for books and other provisions and needs. As word spread of his dogged ministrations, letters began to pour in to him from Confederates in prisons all over the North.

Nothing could stop him. Whenever it all threatened to overcome him, he would imagine the face of his Rebel nephew, David's imprisoned son George G., in place of the nearer prisoners. After he preached to wounded Confederates in a Federal hospital, a throng of his former students at Washington College converged upon him with gratitude and affection. Seeing one who was a Confederate chaplain, he threw his arms around the young man's neck and wept, exclaiming with surprised joy at his erstwhile student's Christian conversion and service, "I never thought you would be engaged in *this* work!" Then, amidst many smiles and many tears, he pulled from his coat pocket the old class book and called roll, recalling remembrances of each fellow.

Again now, at Gettysburg, gold-headed cane in hand, he moved gently among the groaning and the

sorrowing, the wounded and the dying Southern boys littering the vast killing fields. He comforted them and directed them "to Jesus, the all-sufficient Friend and Saviour of Men."

For he had lived among them in a world that now seemed very far away, and he had left behind those most precious to him in that lovely scarred land. They had in the end never turned loose their grip on his great heart. They were, after all, family.

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