Malinda Lewis White Benning. It was an axiom of the long ago that a gentlewoman’s name should appear but twice in print: when she married, and when she died. There is no proof that this was the creed of Mrs. Benning and her kindred, but certain it is that no published paragraph of which she is the heroine has rewarded the most diligent search.

The family Bible records her birth, April 18, 1789. This was in Columbia County, three years after her parents came to Georgia.

With four brothers she was the only daughter, the light of the house, the belle of the county. She was tall and stately, with large blue eyes, rippling brown hair, soft, white hands, and a still softer voice, abeit one to command.

Her father was Capt. Richard P. White, of Hanover County, Virginia, a veteran of the Revolution, a planter, first in Virginia, afterward in Georgia. Her mother was Mary Meriwether, one of the Lewis-Meriwether Clan, which has been omnipresent in every struggle of this country, whether civil or military.

June 8, 1809, at the age of twenty, she was married to Pleasant Moon [Moohm] Benning, a planter of her native county.

A negro melody gives the name of their young mistress to a song-game. Many moonlit summer Saturday nights have discovered her grandchildren seated on the steps of their father’s plantation residence, rapturously watching the negroes from the quarter playing and singing, their mellow voices vibrating in harmony with the rhythm of the Chattahoochee Shoals, just under the hill.

Hands all around, one in the ring, slowly shuffling, and chanting these words:

"Come er trippin’ downstairs, Miss Malindy,
Come er trippin’ downstairs, Miss Malindy,
Come er trippin’ downstairs, wid yer true love by yer side,
You on yer way ter Shiloh."

"Oh, fare you well, Miss Malindy,
Oh, fare you well, Miss Malindy,
Oh, fare you well, an’ er, do fare you well,
You on yer way ter Shiloh."

"What you reckon yer mother say, Miss Malindy?
What you reckon yer mother say, Miss Malindy?
What you reckon yer mother say, wid yer true love by yer side?
You on yer way ter Shiloh."

"Oh, fare you well, Miss Malindy,
Oh, fare you well, Miss Malindy,
Oh, fare you well, an’ er, do fare you well,
You on yer way ter Shiloh."

* Country Church.

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Some of the youngsters wondered if “grandma did run away with grandpa, if she had on caps, and if her mamma was awful mad with her.” The investigations of maturer years disclosed the fact that the marriage was solemnized with the sanction of the family, the church, and the State.

In 1832, Mr. Benning removed to Harris County, settling just below the “Mountain.” Eleven children were born. Of these only four lived to maturity, viz., Henry Lewis, who married Mary Howard, only daughter of Col. Seaborn Jones, M.C., of Columbus; Richard Edwin, married Frances Simpson; Caroline Matilda, married Mr. B. Y. Martin; Augusta Palmyra, married Madison Lewis Patterson, Esq. With the exception of Edwin all resided in Columbus. Mr. Benning died in 1845. After the marriage of Augusta, Mrs. Benning lived with her until the death of Caroline, when she went to Mr. Martin’s, where she stayed until his death, which followed in a few months. She then returned to Mr. Patterson’s, where she died, June 24, 1864.

In speech she was somewhat reserved. Neither did she confide to a journal her youthful pranks, girlish dreams, wedded happiness, maternal joys and griefs, or widowed loneliness. Mistress, by right of birth, of upwards of a hundred slaves, she commanded their love and obedience.

The story of Queen illustrates the attitude of herself and her family toward their dusky subjects. To settle an estate Queen was sold. Some years subsequently she begged to be repurchased. It was done. Her husband belonged to another family. His owners decided to remove from Harris and of course to take Primus, Queen’s husband. She now urged her master to sell her that they might not be separated. This wish was also granted. Years after, after the death of Mr. and Mrs. Benning, after the Civil War and emancipation, Queen and Primus lived in Columbus in the greatest strife. She quarrelled with her relations, repudiated her race, and clung like a barnacle to the family of her dead owners. Woe to “Marse Henry’s gals” if they failed to show her what she considered due attention. She “nussed dey pa,” and her angry voice could be heard for blocks, scolding them for “leffin’ her ’long er dat low-down, one-legged, no nation, quarter-loon, yaller nigger, Primus.” It mattered not a jot to Queen that these young ladies were unconscious of her existence until after the war. She “gwine tell dey An’ Gusty.”

There is an exact science which proves the unknown quantity by the known. According to its reasoning, and judging by the men of her race, a great soldier, a great statesman, or a great jurist was embodied in the womanly personality of Mrs. Benning. Her son is on the records of the State University as honor graduate. In civil life he was judge, in military, general. Two brothers, Clement and Nicolas, were soldiers in the War of 1812, Clement dying in the service. Her father was a Revolutionary captain. His young brother, William, was mortally wounded at Brandywine. Her ancestors, the Meriwethers, Lewises, Warners, Reades, and
Martians helped to lay the foundations of the Republic. Martian was among the first to revolt against the tyranny of the royal governor. Historic Yorktown is located on what was originally his land grant. There, after the lapse of a century and a half, his great-great-grandson, George Washington, received the submission of royalty through its commander-in-chief, Lord Cornwallis. Martian's daughter, Elizabeth, married George Reade, Deputy-Governor and Royal Councillor of Virginia.

Through his mother, Reade was descended from Sir Edward Dymock, hereditary champion of England. Mrs. Benning was his great-great-great-granddaughter. In America her descendants may be members of the Sons of the Revolution, Daughters of the Revolution, Society of Colonial Wars, Colonial Dames, Order of the Crown, etc., etc.

In England, other branches of the Dymock family failing male heirs, they would be the hereditary champions. Had such been the case at the time of the coronation of Queen Victoria, Henry Lewis Benning would have officiated. Superbly mounted, he would have thrown down the gauntlet, and hurled defiance at all who should dispute her Majesty's sovereignty of the vast empire of the British.