

A. D. 1850

My dear Children:

I have thought it might be profitable to you in a moral point of view, to learn something of those families from which you derive your descent, while at the same time the narrative might serve to gratify a very innocent and natural curiosity. For these reasons I have embodied in the following sketches such memorials of your kindred as my own recollection would supply, or could be collected from other authentic sources. More especially I design to portray those among your ancestors, lineal and collateral, who have been in any wise distinguished for talents, or moral worth, holding up these ornaments of your race as examples for your imitation, and trusting that, as the blood of those worthies circulates in your veins, you will show that your conduct is governed by kindred principles of action. For anything like extended biography I am not sufficiently informed, nor, indeed, for the purpose I have in view would the private history of the individual of whose character I shall give you a rude outline, be of any essential importance. Most people are solicitous to collect and preserve the physical semblances of their kindred. The pictures of those material forms, doomed by nature to speedy decay, are carefully suspended on the walls of drawing rooms, while the moral and intellectual qualities of the immortal spirits, by which they were once informed and animated, are suffered to fade into oblivion. In these sketches I have endeavored to supply you with a gallery of moral portraits as far surpassing in value the perishable productions of the pencil, as mind is superior to brute matter. With these models of hereditary worth and honor perpetually before your eyes, you will be inspired, I trust, with a resolution to act in a manner worthy of your race.

.....

On your father's side you are descended of the Dabneys and Morris's and on your mother's of the Towles's and Lewis's. Of the Towles and Lewis families I have not the means at present of giving you any particular account. I shall now confine what I have to say to my own immediate progenitors, with those history, both from personal observation and by tradition, I am more intimately acquainted.