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## Commissary James Blair of Virginia: A Study in Personality and Power

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APPROVAL SHEET

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the requirements for the degree of  
Master of Arts

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	PAGE
PREFACE . . . . .	iv
CHAPTER I	
EARLY YEARS IN VIRGINIA . . . . .	1
CHAPTER II	
REINS OF POWER . . . . .	17
CHAPTER III	
THE COLLEGE AND STRUGGLE WITH NICHOLSON . . . . .	37
CHAPTER IV	
STRUGGLE WITH SPOTSWOOD . . . . .	48
CHAPTER V	
PEACE AND PROGRESS IN LATER YEARS . . . . .	62
BIBLIOGRAPHY . . . . .	78
VITA . . . . .	86



## PREFACE

Surprisingly little has been written about James Blair, 1656-1743. Prominent in many fields of activity in Colonial Virginia, his career coincides with and complements the history of the Church, the State and the College of William and Mary for the closing years of the seventeenth century and almost half of the eighteenth century. Able, conscientious, and contentious he was a part of all that went on in his long years as colonial administrator par excellence. It is hoped that a scholar will come along and put James Blair in a book all his own.

I have enjoyed knowing Mr. Blair through the scattered pages of history. My research in the fine library at the College of William and Mary was made possible by the help of James A. Servies, librarian, and Herbert W. Ganter, archivist. I appreciate their interest and assistance. My thanks also go to the professors at the college who offered suggestions and read the manuscript: Dr. Richard Lee Morton, Dr. William W. Abbot and Dr. Lawrence W. Towner - especially the latter who exhibited rare patience and perseverance; Dr. John M. Jennings, Director of the Virginia Historical Society for use of the Gooch Papers on microfilm in the library of the Research Department of Colonial Williamsburg, Incorporated; and to my good friend, Mrs. Virginia Swain, without whose attention to detail and nimble fingers on the typewriter, this thesis could never have been completed.

## CHAPTER I

## EARLY YEARS IN VIRGINIA

"A most laborious man"<sup>1</sup> was James Blair of Colonial Virginia. He was Commissary of the Bishop of London for fifty-four years. He was one of the founders of the College of William and Mary and its President for fifty years. During these same years, he was from time to time a member of the Governor's Council, President of that Council for a period, and at one time acting Governor of the Colony. Little went on in Virginia from 1685 to 1743 that did not concern this versatile cleric, educator, politician, and exerciser of power. Of the many and varied adversaries with whom James Blair tangled in a long and contentious career, Death was the only one who ever permanently defeated him. Even then Blair fought valiantly: "He struggled with the Conqueror for ten days, after the doctors had declared he could not live ten hours."<sup>2</sup>

James Blair was a Scot, a fact which contributed to his strong moral, and uncompromising character at the same time that it added to his troubles in a world run by Englishmen. Born in 1656, probably in Edinburgh, he was the son of the Reverend Robert Blair, a minister of the Church of Scotland. At the age of eleven, he went off to Marischal College in Aberdeen where he held the Crombie, a scholarship in Greek, for two years. He subsequently attended the University of Edinburgh, from which he received his master's degree in 1673 at the age of seventeen.<sup>3</sup>

The next six years, so far as we know, were spent out of formal academic life, probably at home, studying for the ministry with his father. In 1679, Robert, Viscount of Oxfuird, owner of the advowson of the parish of Cranston in the diocese of Edinburgh, presented the young man to the Right Reverend John Wishart, Bishop of Edinburgh, for ordination and admission to the pastoral charge of Cranston. He was ordained by the Bishop and served as Rector there for two years.<sup>4</sup>

Blair had his first brush with civil authority when he refused to take the Test Oath enacted by the Scottish Parliament under the aegis of Roman Catholic James, Duke of York, Charles II's commissioner in Scotland.<sup>5</sup> Consequently he was ejected from his parish. He left Scotland for London with a letter of recommendation from the Bishop of Edinburgh: "To all concerned, these are to certify & declare, that the bearer hereof, Mr. Jas. Blair, Presbyter, did officiate in the Service of the Holy Ministry as Rector in the Parish of Cranston, in my Diocese of Edinburgh for several years preceding the year 1682, with exemplary diligence, care and gravity, & did in all the course of his Ministry, behave himself Loyally, Peaceably & Canonically, & that this is a truth I certify by these presents, written and Subscribed with my own hand, the 19th day of Aug't. in the year 1683."<sup>6</sup> By resisting the government, he lost not only his parish, but also all hope of getting another church position in Scotland or England—a fact which was to influence his whole life in Virginia.

In London, James Blair worked for three years at the secular employment of Clerk in the office of the Master of the Rolls. Being a minister in the Church of Scotland, and in poor standing at that, he was not eligible to hold a clerical position in England. The shaky English Parliament was demanding a kind of loyalty from its Church leaders that James Blair was not ready to give. But he soon came to the attention of Dr. Henry Compton, Bishop of London, who was ever on the look-out for good men to fill the many benefices under his care, farther afield.

The Bishop of London was not only responsible for his English Diocese, he was also charged with the supervision of the Church of England beyond the seas. The origins of this colonial power of the Bishop are obscure. But the policy seems to have been established by Archbishop Laud as part of the Stuart plan to extend the Church to every part of the world where England was in power. Laud wrote to the merchants of Delph on July 17, 1634, that it was the "King's wish that you conform to the doctrine and discipline of the Church of England under the jurisdiction of the Bishop of London."<sup>7</sup>

Getting missionary clergy to go to the colonies was not easy. In a land where life itself was insecure, such ministerial matters as salaries, tenure of office, and living conditions were also uncertain. The English clergymen in Virginia must have felt themselves to be in the backwaters of culture as they tried to establish church life among the people of their sprawling parishes: The rough, unsettled times worked against the orderly organization

of the Church of England. It is to the credit of Bishop Compton and the general run of English clergy that many good men did come over in the late seventeenth century to serve in the church. Philip Alexander Bruce has written that, "All the surviving records of the Seventeenth century go to show that, whatever, during that long period, may have been the infirmities or unworthy traits of individual clergymen, the great body of those officiating in Virginia were men who performed all the duties of their sacred calling in a manner entitling them to the respect, reverence, and gratitude of their parishoners."<sup>8</sup>

So it was that in 1685 the Bishop of London gave James Blair a license to preach in the Colony of Virginia, an order on the Treasury for £.20 to pay his passage over, and a certificate to present to the Governor, Lord Howard of Effingham, temporarily in London. Blair received instructions from the latter, as Ordinary or deputy of the King.

The New World must have looked strange and yet inviting to the young man who had grown up on the misty moors of Scotland and who had recently lived among the sooty chimney-pots of London. He was used to poverty and filth and cold. But in Virginia, a contemporary historian wrote: "They live in so happy a climate, and have so fertile a soil, that nobody is poor enough to beg or want food."<sup>9</sup>

The parish to which Blair was sent was Varina, or Henrico, in one of the oldest settlements in the colony, on the James River fall-line east of the present City of Richmond. It was still frontier

land and thinly settled. The small community, with its church, jail, court-house, and a few homes, was on the north bank of the river. Travel was generally by water, and when Blair went calling on his parishioners, he went down the river in his sloop, stopping off at small farms and plantations on both sides of the curving river.

The plantation homes were always open to visiting clergymen. "Wakefield," the home of Colonel Benjamin Harrison, in Surry County on the south side of the James River, must have been especially hospitable. The Colonel's seventeen-year-old daughter, Sarah, caught Blair's eye and, after only three month's courtship, they were married in 1687. We know very little of the lady who was Mrs. James Blair. Perhaps ill health or a retiring disposition kept her out of the public eye. Several very small tid-bits give a slight bit of color, but absolutely no substance, to an unfortunately shadowy figure. The double grave-stone of Sarah Harrison Blair and James Blair in the old church-yard at Jamestown is split and cracked open by a huge sycamore tree that has grown up between the two graves. Family tradition claims that nature is paying her back and it serves her right-- she refused to say "Obey" in the marriage ceremony! She is alleged to have said "No Obey" three times when questioned as many times by a probably startled clergyman.

William Byrd of "Westover" refers to Sarah Harrison Blair some nine times in his diary. Most of the references were simply to her being present at some gathering. But once she was in "good

health and very good humor," and again she was "sick and talked queerly." The longest reference occurs on March 2, 1709: "I was very much surprised to find Mrs. Blair drunk, which is growing pretty common with her, and her relations disguise it under the name of consolation."<sup>10</sup> She died in 1713 and her husband never re-married. The couple had no children; so she was denied that one claim to fame that most colonial women had, descendants.

Blair's marriage to the daughter of one of the influential men of the colony did much to bring him into the public eye and to give him social and political standing. It must necessarily have given him a much broader vision of colonial affairs than he would have had from his small parish at the edge of the wilderness. The twenty-odd families who were beginning to consolidate into a distinct class of landed aristocracy welcomed few outsiders or newcomers. Inter-marriage was the general rule. Most of the founders of these families had come well-endowed to the colony. Benjamin Harrison I was one of the few who had arrived inconspicuously. We do not know when or from whence he came. First mention of him was made when he was Clerk of the Royal Council in 1634. He was elected to the House of Burgesses from Surry County in 1642. His son, Benjamin II, Sarah's father, was also a Burgess, later being tapped for the Council. According to the record, brains, business acumen and good looks were a Harrison heritage.<sup>11</sup>

A brief glance at this class of colonials will show that Blair had definitely "arrived" upon the public scene. "By this time," writes Bernard Bailyn, "a permanent ruling class was in evidence in Virginia, broadly based in leading county families and dominated at a provincial level by a privileged officialdom.... There was an acceptance of the fact that certain families were distinguished from others in riches and dignity, and that to them political authority was as a matter of course to be accorded.... Seldom has a governing group so fully justified itself."<sup>12</sup>

James Blair's first five years at Varina, 1685-1690, were uneventful. We have no reports or letters for this period but he must have been busy getting to know the workings of this new land and its government. While there was little official connection between the forty-eight parishes in the colony in the way of conventions or joint reporting, he was learning how the Church of England was faring in its colonial field.<sup>13</sup> He was laying the groundwork for a struggle for personal power that would at one time or another in the fifty years after 1690 involve his family connections, the local church vestries, the clergy convocations, the House of Burgesses, the Governor's Council, the Royal Governors, the Privy Council, the Archbishop of Canterbury and the King himself.

An inconspicuous man in an out-of-the-way corner of one of England's many colonies was spending five quiet years laying away trouble for a great many people. He was to be part of the movement



that shifted the locus of power from the King to the colony, and the lives of many men were changed in the struggle. But before this struggle was even begun, James Blair had to find out about his new world.

The Church of England in Virginia in 1690 was more under the thumb of the King than of the Bishop of London. But Bishop Compton in London continued to be interested in the welfare of the colonial parishes that were only partly under his jurisdiction. The Governor received instruction concerning the church in his colony from the Privy Council, representing the King, and not from the Bishop of London. Beginning about 1680, and with the strong urging of Bishop Compton, an instruction from the Crown was given to each governor to see "that God be duly served, the Book of Common Prayer, as is now established, read each Sunday and Holy Day, and the Blessed Sacrament administered according to the rules of the Church of England. And our will and pleasure is that no minister be preferred by you to any ecclesiastical Benefice in our colony without a certificate from the Lord Bishop of London, of his being conformable to the Doctrines of the Church of England."<sup>14</sup>

The laws passed by the General Assembly in Virginia show that the leaders of the colony were just as concerned over the proper functioning of the Church as were the King and Privy Council in England. In the earliest extant records of this body, from 1619 on, there are laws requiring that a place be set apart for a church on every plantation,

that attendance be made obligatory, and that all should conform to the canons and usages of the Church of England. The inhabitants were to show the clergy proper respect and to pay them "out of the first and best tobacco and corn."<sup>15</sup>

Through the years, new acts were added and old ones amplified to strengthen the position of the Church and improve the condition of the clergy. The revision of all the laws of the colony in 1662 established the framework for the complex relationship of church and state which stood for the remainder of the colonial period. Laws, which in England were made and carried out by ecclesiastical powers, were made and enforced here by civil authorities. The Governor of Virginia had the responsibility of inducting into the parishes the clergymen whom the Bishop of London had licensed. It was he, also, who probated wills and granted marriage licenses. These three functions belonged to the bishops in England. Thus the power of the Church was more limited in the colonies than in the mother country.

There had been talk several times during the seventeenth century of a resident bishop in the colonies. In 1672 a charter was drawn up in England for the creation of a Diocese of Virginia, which was to include Bermuda. By 1675 an "old friend of the king," Alexander Moray, was selected as bishop-designate. He had served Ware Parish in Gloucester County. Hearings were held upon his qualifications for the position and then the book is closed. Records are too fragmentary to determine exactly what happened to cause the failure of this plan. The charter was never signed by the King and so the Reverend Mr. Moray and

the demand for an American episcopate dropped for the time being from colonial history.<sup>16</sup>

Later, others advocated a bishop for Virginia. Bishop Compton in 1707 pointed out the obvious need for adequate episcopal supervision. He suggested that "an absolute Bishop would not be so proper at least to begin with as a Suffragan."<sup>17</sup> His carefully worked-out plan never had a trial, although the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts also agitated for a bishop for all the colonies. Queen Anne was definitely interested, but she and Bishop Compton died within a year of each other and their respective successors were uninterested in the problem. A bishop for overseas churchmen did not become a reality until after the Revolution. Then the American bishop-to-be had to go to Scotland for his consecration. The first commissary and the first bishop in English-speaking North America both came to power through the side door of Scotland.

Local church government in the forty-eight scattered parishes of Virginia, serving its 40,000 inhabitants, was in the hands of the individual church vestries. The vestry in Virginia, though inherited from England, was in fact shaped by the conditions and needs of life in the colony.<sup>18</sup> "In every Parish, by the Law of that Country, there is a Vestry consisting of twelve Men, chosen at first by all the Masters of Families in the Parish. They have a power to continue themselves, for as one dyes or removes out of the

Parish, the remaining Vestrymen chuse another in his room. Those Vestry-men lay the Parish Levy, and manage all other parochial Matters. The Power of presenting Ministers is in them by the Law of that Country."<sup>19</sup> These self-perpetuating vestries had many duties other than parochial. They supervised the land processioning, or surveying, each year, they were responsible for the charity work of the community, and in general they supervised the moral welfare of the parish as a whole.

That church and state were inseparable in the lower echelons in Colonial Virginia was shown by the composition of the ecclesiastical and the political ruling bodies in the local communities. Many Vestrymen were Justices of the Peace and, as such, comprised the local courts. Many members of the House of Burgesses were vestrymen back home. These leaders were men of substance and education and it worked well to have the "vestries be the depositories of local power in Virginia."<sup>20</sup>

The churchwardens, chosen each year by the minister, had specific tasks. They were required to keep the church building in repair, to collect and pay the minister's salary, and to present to the County Courts those persons charged with "offenses against morals and religion."<sup>21</sup> Lay leaders were also important members of the ruling group in the local church. Many parishes were too large for one church to serve all the inhabitants, so provision was made for "chappells of ease", small buildings, to be built and to be served

by laymen, "grave and sober persons of good life and conversation."<sup>22</sup> A house and farm land, known as the glebe, were to be furnished the minister in addition to a salary "to be paid in valuable and current comodities of the country," an amount equal to at least eighty pounds sterling a year.<sup>23</sup>

The proper payment for a preacher was a subject for frequent debate and legislation. Sometimes his sermons were worth their weight in tobacco and sometimes they were not. This salary was actually paid in tobacco and getting the proper amount and grade of tobacco to equal a cash settlement of eighty pounds required some legerdemain.

The induction of clergymen was another difficult problem. The vestries were instructed by law to present their minister to the Royal Governor for induction.<sup>24</sup> He in turn had been instructed by the King to induct those men when presented for induction. A minister, thus presented and then inducted, could hold his parish job for life. Theoretically everyone then lived happily ever after. But actually the parishes sometimes got stuck with an unsatisfactory gentlemen of the cloth. Consequently, few clergymen were presented.

It must be remembered that none of the seventeenth century clergymen were native sons. They came as strangers to a new and changing land. And they were strangers to their parishoners. So the vestries did not present their clergymen for induction, but merely engaged them on a year-to-year basis. Blair referred to this practice as "a contrary custom of making annual agreements with the ministers

which they call by a name coarse enough, viz. Hiring of the Minister."<sup>25</sup>

This system was not necessarily a disadvantage. To Robert Beverley, it seemed actually an advantage. "No qualified clergyman ever returned to England for want of preferment in Virginia," he wrote. "The minister failing to secure induction enjoyed by force of his agreement with the vestry all the pecuniary advantages possessed by the one who had been inducted. The average clergyman in Virginia was in a better position, from a worldly point of view, than the average member of his calling residing in the rural districts of England."<sup>26</sup>

James Blair in 1690, after five years residence, found the Church of England well-established in Virginia. The final authority in church affairs was the Royal Governor, who received his orders from the Privy Council in England, acting for the King. Thus the locus of power was definitely the Crown. We have no records of any kind to show what James Blair thought about affairs, but we may well conjecture that the young clergyman wondered; he may well have wondered if the Church in Virginia would not be better off with more power in colonial hands, particularly if those hands were his.

Distance prevented Bishop Compton from coming over to Virginia to see how his missionaries fared. He may have heard rumors that church matters were disorganized, with each parish handling its own affairs. On paper, of course, the Royal Governor, as King's Ordinary, was the ecclesiastical leader, and church laws were all written

down. But actually each vestry was the power in the parish. Bishop Compton appointed a commissary in 1689 who was to be his personal representative in Virginia. James Blair was Compton's choice. We shall try to see if the colony and the church were either, or both of them, better or worse off when, in 1743, James Blair was laid to rest next to Sarah Harrison Blair in Jamestown at the end of his contentious career.

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## CHAPTER II

## REINS OF POWER

Blair's commission as commissary was issued by the Bishop of London on December 15, 1689, and was brought to Virginia by Colonel Francis Nicholson when he came as the new lieutenant-governor in the spring of 1690. Nicholson presented his own credentials to the Council and took the oath of office as lieutenant-governor on June 3, 1690. On the following day he presented Blair's commission to that body. In the Council's reply, "The Lieutenant-Governor was requested to return to his Lordship the humble thanks of this Board for his pious care in this affair, and the reposing the trust in one so well deserving thereof as the said Mr. Blair."<sup>1</sup>

James Blair's commission read as follows:

Henry, by Divine permission Bishop of London, to all the faithful in Christ to whom this present Writing may come. Greeting eternal in the Lord.

Know ye that we, the Bishop of London aforesaid, to whom every ecclesiastical jurisdiction, and in every way, under Virginia situated in America, by Royal Constitutions is generally recognized to pertain, (except the power of granting licenses for celebrating marriages, probating wills of deceased persons and conferring benefices), have named, made and constituted; and by these presents do name, make and constitute, James Blaire, Clerk, our Commissary in and throughout all Virginia aforesaid, trusting very greatly his learning, probity and industry, with all and every power of carrying out and performing, (previous exceptions excepted), whatever pertains and belongs, or ought to pertain and belong, to the office of our Commissary aforesaid, by law or custom according to the laws, canons and constitutions followed and observed, in the Church of England; with

power moreover to set one or more clerk or clerks  
as substitute or substitutes in his place.

In confidence and in testimony of all and  
singular of which premises we have caused our Episcopal  
Seal to be placed upon these presents.

Given on the fifteenth day of the month of December  
in the year of our Lord, 1689, and in the twenty-fourth  
year of our Translation.

H. London.<sup>2</sup>

The duties of the new commissary were vaguely worded in  
this commission. The formal language of the day perhaps served to  
cover up indecision in the Bishop's mind. And perhaps personal letters,  
now lost, passed between the two men, already friends. Certainly in  
the document we have there was not much real power given to James  
Blair. He started on his quest for power within six weeks of receiv-  
ing his commission.

On July 23, 1690, he called all the Virginia clergy to-  
gether at Jamestown. There is no record of who attended nor any  
minutes of the meeting. But action was taken by the clergy on two  
important matters. They approved Blair's startling plan for ecclesiastic-  
al courts and they passed a resolution appealing for help in establish-  
ing a college in Virginia.

Blair's proclamation about the revolutionary plan for the  
courts was presumably sent out to the minister and vestry of every  
parish and to the civil officials of every county. There is no  
mention of this momentous document in the records of the General  
Assembly or any place else in colonial records. Knowledge of its

existence came to light only a few years ago when copies of colonial papers in the Public Records Office in London were sent to the Library of Congress. The proclamation announced that the new commissary intended "to revive and put into execution the ecclesiastical laws against all cursers, swearers and blasphemers: all whoremongers, fornicators and adulteres; all drunkards, ranters, profaners of the Lord's Day and contemners of the Sacraments; and all other scandalous persons whether of the clergy or the laity within this colony and Dominion of Virginia."<sup>3</sup> To carry out his plan, he proposed to divide the colony into four districts, with a minister as his assistant in each, with orders to hold a court twice a year.

These ecclesiastical courts would supersede the civil courts of the counties which had hitherto had jurisdiction over cases against moral law presented to them by the vestries of the local parishes. Judges were to be appointed by Blair and answerable only to him.<sup>4</sup> The whole idea was so different from the loosely organized legal system then prevailing in Virginia, that the outcry must have been considerable. There is a reference by Lieutenant-Governor Nicholson, ardent supporter of Blair at this time, to a "great clamour against the bishop's commissary."<sup>5</sup>

So James Blair's first bid for personal power came to naught. It is impossible to trace the demise of the proclamation because there are no records of its being publicly discussed. In fact, the public bodies who must have received a copy did not even

mention its receipt in their records or keep it in their files. To become the law of the land, the plan had to be accepted by the House of Burgesses. Perhaps the Burgesses refused to consider it. Perhaps Blair sounded out a few people in trying to get public reaction and, on finding opinion adverse, decided not to send the suggestion to the House. Whatever the cause, Blair's first bright scheme to shift power closer to himself seems to have received the silent treatment.

A number of years later, the Commissary wrote Bishop Robinson that Bishop Compton had "instructed him chiefly to restrain the Clergy without meddling with the Laity until the Virginia laws should recognize his right in the latter."<sup>6</sup> It is very probable that this advice was forthcoming when the Bishop of London heard of the proposed courts. Hugh Jones later wrote, "In Virginia there is no ecclesiastical court, so that vice, prophaneness, and immorality are not suppressed so much as might be. The people hate the very name of the bishop's court."<sup>7</sup> Certainly there is no evidence that lay people were ever brought to account by the Commissary. Blair restricted his attention to the clergy.

He did have the power to take away the license to preach from any minister he judged unworthy. But in all his years as commissary, he only suspended two clergymen. Knowledge that the commissary had that power was probably enough to keep the ministers in line. Clergy were too hard to come by to be dismissed lightly. "Because of the

want of clergymen to fill vacancies", Blair wrote in 1724, "I choose rather to lean to the gently than the severe side."<sup>8</sup>

That first clergy conference in 1690 had education, as well as ecclesiastical courts, on its agenda. Learning has ever been a concern of the Church. Blair has been in Virginia only a few years when the lack of educational facilities in the Colony began to worry him. A contemporary wrote of him, "While his thoughts were wholly intent upon doing good in his office, he observed with true concern, that the want of schools, and proper seminaries for Religion and Learning, was such a Damp upon all great attempts for the Propagation of the Gospel, that little could be hoped for, without first removing that Obstacle."<sup>9</sup>

As long as all the clergy coming to the Colony came foreign-born and foreign-trained with their abilities and their personalities unknown, the Church in Virginia would lack a basic element of cohesion. Only if the commissary, the clergymen, and the vestries all knew each other well, would any measure of stability be attained. So a Virginia-born and Virginia-trained body of clergy was Blair's next dream. The ministerial candidates still would have to go to the Bishop of London to be ordained and to obtain a license. But they would begin their work where they were known. And the Church would have its clerical roots in the soil in which it was to grow.

The suggestion of a college for Virginia had been made twice before and tentative plans had been laid. In 1619, £ 1500 was

raised in England and 10,000 acres of land were set aside in Henrico County. George Thorpe was appointed manager and had bricks laid and pupils lining up when the Indian massacre of 1622 wiped the project out. Then in 1650, the Virginia Assembly passed resolutions for the founding of a college, "for the advance of learning, education of youth, supply of the ministry, and promotion of piety."<sup>10</sup> But the proposal received no support in England and no college was established.

Blair, as Commissary, presented to the Virginia government the petition for a college from the clergy convocation of 1690. The plan was quickly approved by the General Assembly and the governor. Funds were solicited immediately. Nicholson "promised it all imaginable Encouragement."<sup>11</sup> He appointed forty-two commissioners, James Blair leading the list, whose task was to raise money and "to try to Humour the people in general."<sup>12</sup> Moral and financial support was forthcoming from the Virginians and enthusiasm ran high.

The next step was to send someone to England to arouse interest there and to secure a charter. James Blair was obviously the best choice and the General Assembly in June of 1691 sent him off with a long list of instructions and requests, and a generous expense account of £ 200.<sup>13</sup> The general outline for a college had already been decided upon and its many similarities to the Scottish, rather than the English, universities show Blair's hand in the planning. The inclusion of a preparatory department as an integral part of the college was one of its Scottish characteristics. A Board of lay trustees was another.<sup>14</sup>

James Blair had a busy and successful visit in London. During his eighteen month's stay, he saw and convinced many people, among them the Queen who influenced the King later. He returned to Virginia in the spring of 1693 with a charter for the College of William and Mary signed February 8, 1693. The faculty of the college was to consist of six professors and a president, Blair being "created and established first president during his natural life." Also there were to be "an hundred scholars more or less."

There was to be a board of not more than twenty trustees headed by Lieutenant Francis Nicholson, which was to run the college until such time as it should be in good working order and then it was to hand the governing power over to the professors and president who were to become "a Body Politick and Incorporate."<sup>15</sup> These provisions show a thoughtful and careful consideration on the part of the Crown. Blair also had with him a master for the proposed grammar school. School work was to begin at once on a pre-college level. And he had a set of architectural plans for the main building from the aged Sir Christopher Wren.<sup>16</sup>

There was an assured income for the college from public funds. An outright gift of nearly £ 2000 from Virginia taxes accumulated in the royal treasury was made. Then a tax of a penny on every pound of exported tobacco from Virginia and Maryland was levied for the college. The profits from the Colonial Office of Surveyor were assigned to the new institution. Lastly, 20,000 acres of vacant



land were given the college on condition that a quit-rent of Latin verses be paid each year.<sup>17</sup>

Obviously, the majority of officials in England wished the new college well. So Benjamin Franklin's amusing folk tale points up the attitude of only a few British officials. The Queen, in the story, asked the attorney general for £ 2000 cash for Blair for the college. That worthy objected, saying that he saw no need for a college in Virginia. Blair explained that the college was to train men to be ministers of the Gospel and that the people of Virginia had souls to be saved just as did the people of England. "Souls," exclaimed the attorney-general, "damn their souls. Let them make tobacco."<sup>18</sup>

Blair has been accused of being avaricious.<sup>19</sup> He did seem to have had a way of acquiring funds not nailed down. Two examples can be shown from this trip to England. He heard of the will of the Honorable Robert Boyle which had in it a permanent trust fund of sizeable proportions for the purpose of Christianizing the American Indian. Blair appears to have had no difficulty in procuring the money to build and maintain an Indian school at the college. Brafferton Hall was later built with this largesse, and, although the Indian school was never a great success, the capital stayed in the college exchequer.<sup>20</sup>

The other unexpected or "accidental" income for the college really took some imaginative finagling. Blair made a deal

with three pirates, who had plied their trade out of Virginia ports and who were in jail in London, that he would get them out and get back for them their ill-gotten gains in return for £ 300 for his new college. With the aid of a couple of friends, he did so. Blair wrote home to Nicholson in 1692, "I presently employed the Archbishop of Canterbury and Bishop of London who have so managed it with the Council that the Council is very glad of the expedient."<sup>21</sup> One of the few times in Blair's long life of controversy when everyone involved with him came out happy.

This trip to London to give the dream of a college for Virginia some substance was, as we shall see, the first of five trips abroad for James Blair on public business. Each time he returned home a little more powerful himself and with some institution in Virginia the stronger for his advocacy. This time a new institution was created, the church was stronger in the promise of future home leadership, and Blair himself had future claims on a prominent position as President of the college and a promised income of £ 150 a year in his new office.

Blair now had high hopes for the church in Virginia, but he also realized that the present status of the clergy needed immediate attention. He had had them in mind in England when he was asking for money for the college. At his suggestion, the Queen sent an order to Lieutenant-Governor Nicholson that a great part of the income from the quit-rents be used to augment the clergy salaries.<sup>22</sup> Incidentally

this included a salary of £ 100 sterling for the commissary, an important matter which had not been attended to earlier. Bishop Compton had not mentioned a commissarial salary in his commission. But Blair, looking out for Blair, figured £ 100 per annum fit compensation.

The quit-rent money, however, had customarily been used to pay the expenses of the colonial government, including the governor's handsome salary of £ 1,000.<sup>23</sup> So the governor, Sir Edmund Andros, (who had replaced Nicholson in Blair's absence), was the first to object. He claimed that the colonial government could not function without these funds. The King stepped in and modified the Queen's orders, saying that the quit-rents would be used as in the past for three years. Then, if there was a surplus, the ministers would get the extra money. Herein lay the seeds of a dispute that was to oust the governor and make Blair even more powerful.

When Blair became a member of the Council of State of Virginia the field of battle became political. This Council was a body of twelve men, appointed by the King, who were to aid the Royal Governor in his many tasks. As the upper house of the General Assembly they had legislative powers, as the General Court they made the ultimate judicial decisions on the American side of the ocean, and in their advisory capacity they had executive power. They were collectively and individually the most powerful men in the colony. So it must have pleased Blair, if not Andros, to be appointed a Councillor in 1694.

Blair and Andros soon came to verbal blows over money and policy. Blair accused Andros of sneaking unusual items into the quit-rent fund expenditures so that there would not be any surplus for the clergymen's salaries. He also claimed that Andros hindered the building of the college and opposed ecclesiastical discipline. The Commissary pronounced the governor an enemy to college and religion.<sup>24</sup>

The Council was an orderly body and the noise must have confused them. They voted to suspend the clamorous commissary.<sup>25</sup> The King, however, sent orders to Andros to re-instate him the following year, in 1696. Blair would be down after some of his bouts but he would not be out. He was always a dangerous and vital adversary.

An unhappy impasse was reached and the Archbishop of Canterbury and Bishop Compton of London held a hearing in England in 1697 on the whole dispute at which both Blair and representatives of the Governor were present. Charges and counter-charges flew back and forth. The truth of the matter was hard to find.

The curiosity of other officials in England was aroused by this dispute as it was being aired at Lambeth Palace in 1697. The recently appointed Lords Commissioners of Trade and Plantations (known also as the Board of Trade) were interested. John Locke, one of the founders of the Board of Trade and an architect of its policy, was particularly interested in Virginia. Letters passed between

Locke and Blair show a personal regard and a sharing of mutual interests. Locke asked Blair for "seeds of all strange and curious plants and a plentiful stock of peach stones."<sup>26</sup>

On this occasion, when Blair was in London, Locke was the one responsible for getting from him a written report on affairs in Virginia—a fact only recently discovered by historians.<sup>27</sup> In late August or early September, 1697, Locke took him to his private rooms and had him write out a treatise on Virginia. Locke then dictated, in Blair's presence, a list of searching queries. This list of questions was sent out officially by the Board of Trade to three men, well-versed in Virginia affairs. Blair was one, of course, and Edward Chilton, formerly attorney-general in Virginia another. The third was Henry Hartwell who had been a councillor in the Colony. The result was The Present State of Virginia and the College, one of the most frequently cited sources for Virginia history of that period.

The account opens by declaring that those who described Virginia as "the best, and the worst country in the world" may both be right. "That as to all the Natural Advantages of the Country, it is one of the best, but as to Improved Ones, one of the worst of all the English Plantations in America ... if we enquire for well-educated children, for an happy Government in Church and State ... it is certainly one of the poorest, miserablest and worst Countries in all America, that is inhabited by Christians ... no doubt it is chiefly to be imputed ... to the narrow, selfish Ends of most of

their Governors, who go easily into any Projects whereby they may make a present gain."<sup>28</sup>

The descriptions of the Land with its natural wealth and potentialities are probably accurate but the criticisms of the Governor along with comments on politics and religion must be taken cautiously. The book was written by all three men, but Blair, being just off the boat from Virginia, would naturally have had the deciding word. And he came to England, not to disseminate information but to get Andros removed, in which endeavor he was successful.

Back in Virginia, Blair was in a stronger position than ever to use his power to help better the condition of the clergy as to salary and tenure and then to get his college really started. Several times before, Blair had petitioned the General Assembly to raise the clergy salaries and pay them from colonial funds. Hitherto, clergy had been paid from local parish taxes. Now in 1696 the Assembly voted to make all ministers' salaries 1600 pounds of tobacco, payable, as usual, by the vestries.<sup>29</sup> Vexing questions as to the kind of tobacco and who was to pay the fee for collecting and the casking charge arose often but the 1600 pounds of tobacco stood as the standard clerical recompense until the Revolution. Thus, payment for the clergy was kept in the hands of the local vestries, the parish taxes being payable in tobacco.

Blair's plan to augment these salaries from colonial or imperial coffers did not succeed. But he did improve clergy

salaries by insisting on promptness of pay and a good quality of tobacco being given to the dominie. No bottom leaves were palmed off on the parson while Blair was around. In the long run Blair was to see that it was better to keep the real power of the church localized in the vestries. At a later date he won a battle to keep the power of the vestries intact. A church that was strong at its base was his aim.

It is significant that Blair never once mentioned a bishop for Virginia. Did he think a Bishop would tie the Virginia Churches too closely to England? Was he afraid of a Bishop carrying out clerical orders from the King more meticulously than a Royal Governor? Was the independence of the Virginia Church more important to Blair than the fact that the church was made up of unconfirmed members? Or was he perhaps afraid of losing his own power? His ordination in the Church of Scotland would have made his eligibility for the job questionable. We have no record even of his mentioning the matter. Not being a reticent man, he probably just did not wish the question discussed. Blair had some of the prestige, if not any of the power, of a bishop in Virginia, and he must have enjoyed the perquisites of that prestige.

Induction of the clergy was the next matter that Blair took up upon his return from his successful bout for power with Andros in 1697. Blair was probably influential in getting the King to appoint Colonel Francis Nicholson as Lieutenant-Governor again

in 1698. The orders that were given the new lieutenant-governor by the Privy Council included, as they always did, instructions to induct ministers into the parishes. However, the Virginia act of 1662 which allowed the vestries to take the initiative was still in force. Nicholson knew colonial churches and he must have seen both sides. From the clergy side, it would be secure and pleasant to have a job for life. From the lay side, it would be uncertain and perhaps catastrophic to accept an unknown minister from England for his life-time.

To clear up the problem, Nicholson submitted a query to Sir Edward Northey, the Queen's Attorney-General, in 1703. The opinion of Northey was to the effect that the law of 1662 was still in order. No objections were raised to the asserted right of the vestries as "patrons" to select ministers and present them to the governor for induction. But, if the vestries did not "present some suitable minister within six months" for collation, then the Governor was to go ahead and select and induct one.<sup>30</sup>

This official opinion was received by Nicholson, given to the Council, and, in turn, sent to the churchwardens in every parish with the request from the council that they "offer to his Excellency what they think proper thereupon."<sup>31</sup> The vestries promptly wrote back their opinions, that they were unwilling to present their ministers for induction.<sup>32</sup>



The clergy tried to force this issue of induction, too. In 1703 twenty of them wrote to the Bishop of London. After lauding Nicholson for his efforts to secure permanent positions for them, they added, "But we are not ignorant that Mr. Commissary hath given too much encouragement to Vestrys by siding with them against the opinion of the Govern'r."<sup>33</sup>

Thus the question of induction was a complicated one in 1703 in Virginia. The Governor was willing, and perhaps anxious, to induct clergymen for all of parishes in the colony. The Commissary wished the men under his care inducted, but he wanted them chosen and presented by the vestries, not selected by the governor. Then there were the powerful vestries who desired to choose their ministers but not present them for induction. There were also the clergymen, themselves, who naturally favored induction. Four attitudes toward the same problem precluded any easy solution.

Nicholson, in the interest of peace, did nothing, inducting not one clergyman in his seven years in office. This fact gave Blair a strong lever to use when he was struggling to oust Nicholson in 1705. That Blair seemed inconsistent in the matter of inductions at this time may be due to the fact that it was the choice, not the induction, that concerned him. He wanted the power of the choice of minister to remain always in the hands of the local body, the vestry.<sup>34</sup>

Blair had been commissary for thirteen years by 1703, the year of his third trip to England. The accounting that he made to the Bishop of London was creditable. He himself was still rector of a flourishing church, having moved from Varina to Jamestown in 1695. In the early 1690s there had been twenty-two clergymen for the forty-eight parishes; by 1703 there were forty clergymen.<sup>35</sup> He had made the lives of the clergy more pleasant and more secure by regularizing their salaries and getting their homes and glebes repaired by the vestries. He had made an effort to have the clergy inducted and he would keep on trying. He had made the local church organization stronger by insisting that the choice of minister lay with the vestry, not the Royal Governor.

By 1705, most of his time and effort were being spent on the College of William and Mary, the institution that he hoped would train Virginia-born men for the ministry. Men trained at the college were also to serve in county and colonial government. The college at <sup>one</sup> end of the Duke of Gloucester Street in Williamsburg served as a constant reminder to the men in the Capitol at the other end of the street that Virginia-born leadership was growing stronger.

## ENDNOTES

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## CHAPTER III

## THE COLLEGE AND STRUGGLE WITH NICHOLSON

The College of William and Mary was the second college founded in the American Colonies.<sup>1</sup> It was a credit to Colonial Virginians who wanted an educated leadership and to James Blair who wanted an indigenous body of clergy. Blair had secured a charter from Their Majesties in 1693, "to the end that the Church in Virginia may be furnished with a Seminary of Ministers of the Gospel, and that the Youth may be piously educated in Good Letters and Manners, and that the Christian Faith may be propagated amongst the Western Indians."<sup>2</sup> He was to spend the rest of his years trying to fulfill its aims.

A site for the college was chosen at Middle Plantation (later Williamsburg) and the cornerstone of the college building was laid with proper ceremony on August 8, 1695. The Council suggested to Governor Andros, "it will be now a further encouragement to the said work, if his Excellency please to go, and the gentlemen of the Council will be ready to attend him at the laying of the said foundation."<sup>3</sup>

Once built, the college was soon in financial difficulties. The taxes levied on exported tobacco and rentals from college land were not as large as expected. A considerable sum of money, £ 2500 or more, had been subscribed by Virginians, but only a small part could

be collected. It was charged that "the college is in Danger of being ruin'd by the Backwardness of the Government."<sup>4</sup> Blair blamed Andros for this, asserting at the trial in London in 1697 that the Governor had urged his friends not to pay up.<sup>5</sup>

Nonetheless, "Scholastick Exercises" took place in May of 1699, at which time the colony could assess its embryo college. Colonel Francis Nicholson was Governor again and all was well between him and Blair. The Governor, the Councillors, and the Burgesses closed governmental shop for a day and all rode over from Jamestown for the gala ceremony at the college.

Governor Nicholson read a speech in which he praised the literary attainments of the young scholars. Then an address of thanks to the Assembly was presented by the three members of the faculty, President Blair, Mr. Ingles, and the usher.<sup>6</sup> Five students also spoke. Their recorded speeches show mature minds and must have impressed the audience with the need for greater support for the college to give them further training. The third student speaker urged the government to consider moving its headquarters from Jamestown to Williamsburg. The statehouse at Jamestown had recently burned and plans for a future building were uncertain. The student insisted that the change would be "of benefit for the Colledge and will be a great help towards the making of a Towne, and the Towne towards the improving of the Colledge."<sup>7</sup>

Whoever conceived the idea of having the Government and the College use the college building jointly must have regretted it more than once. The record has it that "the Trustees and Governours of the Colledge offer to His Excellency whatsoever rooms he needs."<sup>8</sup> Living in makeshift quarters in Jamestown, the Governor was undoubtedly delighted to move over to the handsome new college building in the spring of 1700. We can visualize the Governor, the Councillors, the Burgesses, and their respective retinues making themselves at home in the small village and using the still-unfinished Wren Building as headquarters. They arrived complete with their appurtenances of power, "six of the smallest Pieces of Ordnance, together with the Great Shott."<sup>9</sup>

At the same time, the college people were moving into the building, which they used for dormitories as well for school rooms. "In this part are contained all conveniences of cooking, brewing, baking, etc. and convenient rooms for the reception of the President and masters with many more scholars than are as yet come to it. In this part are also the hall and school room."<sup>10</sup>

Friction between Governor Nicholson and President Blair soon became apparent. Although there are voluminous records of the struggle for power between these two men, it is almost impossible to find out what made the two former friends enemies. Possibly the trouble started when these two strong-willed men began to use the same property for different purposes.<sup>11</sup> Some personalities need



both physical and spiritual space to function properly and perhaps there was just not enough room in the Wren Building for both men.

Blair said of Nicholson, "I have heard him swear that he will seize the College for the King's use and he crowded into it the Secretary's office, the Clerk of the Council's office, the Clerk of the House of Burgesses' office, and all their lodgings, with himself and all their committees, and had all his public treats in the great hall, to the great disturbance of the college business."<sup>12</sup> Blair was obviously not the gracious host he might have been, nor was Nicholson a considerate guest. Bad temper did not help an already tense situation. "The governor governs us as if we were a company of Galley slaves, by continual roaring and thundering, cursing and swearing, base, abusive billingsgate language to that degree it is utterly incredible to those who have not been spectators of it."<sup>13</sup>

On top of his personal quarrel with Blair, the unhappy Nicholson was in love with a young lady who would have none of him. Eighteen-year-old Lucy Burwell paid no attention to the sentimental forty-six-year-old bachelor who composed saccharin Valentines and puerile poetry and love letters written at 2 A. M. to "My Dove."<sup>14</sup> Nicholson swore that, if she married anyone else, he would cut the throats of the bridegroom, the official issuing the license, the parson who performed the ceremony, and members of Lucy Burwell's family.<sup>15</sup> Nicholson imagined that Dr. Archibald Blair, brother of

the President, was his rival, and "conceived the strongest objections to him and all his relatives." He sent for Blair and abruptly addressed him in these words, "Sir, your brother is a villain, and you have betrayed me."<sup>16</sup> Hardly dignified behavior for a Royal Governor!

Another undignified episode was the "barring out" of President Blair just before Christmas vacation of 1702. Blair accused Nicholson of encouraging the students to barricade the college building against the president and the masters and of furnishing the boys with arms and ammunition. Only the timely warning that the students really meant to fire saved Blair from a danger which he had "too much reason to suspect was contrived on purpose." However, this noisy practice was a customary prank of the times, being used by students to gain extra time at Christmas. Blair was probably not in danger of losing his life, just his dignity.<sup>17</sup>

The personal feud soon involved others. In May of 1703, six councillors signed a petition to Queen Anne asking that Nicholson be recalled. The grounds for complaint were "the many great grievances and pressures endured by reason of the unusuall, insolent and arbitrary methods" of the governor and of his "wicked and scandalous life."<sup>18</sup>

A petition always has more force when presented by a forceful man. Who was better qualified than James Blair, a council member himself, a known enemy of Nicholson, and a man who has

successfully ousted one governor already? So Blair left for England in the summer of 1703 to spend the next two years in negotiations leading to the recall of Nicholson.

Blair had the first "go-round" in the hearing before the Lords Commissioners of Trade and Plantations--always an advantage in any struggle. He was on the spot with the petition in his hand and plenty of time to formulate charges. Many of the charges brought by him were false, many were exaggerated, many were silly, and many were true. It was hard to sort them out then and impossible now.

Blair represented the members of the council, that group of wealthy land-owners who were trying to get more and more power in their own hands. It was the group that Blair was an integral part of because he had married into it and because he shared their ideal of centering power in the colony, not England. This group never pretended to have democratic aims. But when they dreamed of the future for themselves and their country, they envisioned themselves, not an English Parliament, at the center of power. They expected to remain loyal to the Crown but they wanted to be governed by their peers here, not in England.

Nicholson represented the power of the English Crown. At the hearing his agent in London, John Thrale, asserted that the power that Nicholson claimed was not for himself but for the Queen, and that the men in Virginia did not understand the true function of a Royal Governor.<sup>19</sup> Thrale put up a steady defense, discounting the

personal accusations and stressing the fact that Nicholson had been active in keeping the power of the English sovereign supreme in a land where the inhabitants wanted more power themselves.

When Thrale died, after only a few months of the hearing, Nicholson lost his voice in court. Papers had to be sent back and forth across the ocean. Once they got waylaid in New York City in transit to him, and once his answers were thrown overboard by pirates who captured the ship which carried them. So Nicholson's side was never adequately presented. And Blair's statements in court were taken more seriously than the facts now seem to warrant.<sup>20</sup>

Nicholson was recalled in 1705. Most of the remaining twenty-three years of his life were spent in government service. In 1713 he became Governor of Nova Scotia, after leading military expeditions against the French there. And in 1720 he undertook his last colonial governorship in South Carolina. He seemed to have had trouble working with people wherever he went. An Indian, who once saw him in a fit of rage, is said to have remarked that he was "born durnk."<sup>21</sup>

Blair returned home to resume his many duties. He found his clergy in rebellion against him. The convention he called in August, 1705, was a stormy one, with most of the clergy still supporting Nicholson, who had been their staunch supporter. Twenty-three clergy signed their names to a document stating that Blair's charges against Nicholson were "frivolous, scandalous, false and malicious."<sup>22</sup> It was an acrimonious meeting in which Blair's leadership was weakened.

However, he was still leader of the movement for a good college for Virginia. The college, through all these years of contention on the part of its president, had been slowly growing. It was in 1705 still primarily a grammar school. Just as affairs seemed to be getting ordered after the departure of the General Assembly to its own new headquarters down the Duke of Gloucester Street, the Wren Building burned down.<sup>23</sup>

Records of the College of William and Mary unfortunately were almost entirely lost or destroyed after the disastrous fire. But President Blair, in defending himself to Governor Edward Nott, who had been sent over to replace Governor Nicholson, pointed out that, while the college at that point was still clearly only a grammar school, the intent of the founders was to make it indeed a college. He closed his letter, "If by various impediments, it has not attained its intended perfection, it would be more commendable to think of helping it to be what it wants to be than to destroy what it is."<sup>24</sup>

The college, with Blair as its perpetual president, must have been struggling during these quiet years to stay alive after the destructive fire of 1705. Perhaps classes were held informally in town. Certainly the desire and enthusiasm for a college never died out. Young William Byrd, A Councillor and man of estate, mentioned concern for the college often in his diary. A typical day in 1709 will show to what lengths he and his friends went to attend to college business. "We rose at 2 o'clock this morning and went in the

sloop's boat to Mr. Harvey's, where we arrived by break of day and our horses were ready for us....We rode to town and got there before 10 o'clock. At Mr. Bland's I ate some milk and then went to see the President. From hence we went to the school house where we at last determined to build the college on the old walls and appointed workmen to view them and compute the charge. From hence we went to the Commissary's to dinner. In the evening we rode to Green Springs and lay there all night. But this hurry made me neglect to say my prayers, for which God forgive me. However, I had good health, good thoughts, and good humor, thanks be to God Almighty."<sup>25</sup>

Fortunately there was no political crisis during these years, 1705-1710. The lieutenant-governorship of Virginia went in 1705 to Major Edward Nott, as the Earl of Orkney's deputy. Blair approved, writing, "He has as good character in all respects as we can wish."<sup>26</sup> It was sad for all when he died one year after taking office. His successor, Colonel Robert Hunter, was captured by the French en route and never arrived. The colonial government was under the President of the Council until 1710 when Colonel Alexander Spotswood arrived as new lieutenant-governor. The colony was ripe for change and progress.

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## CHAPTER IV

## STRUGGLE WITH SPOTSWOOD

Alexander Spotswood was born at an English military post in Tangier. After spending his childhood in military camps, he entered the army and served under the Duke of Marlborough for some years. At the Battle of Blenheim he was badly wounded. Upon retirement from the army, he went directly into colonial civil service as lieutenant-governor of Virginia in 1710. Thirty-four years old, he was already trained to command.<sup>1</sup>

Rarely, if ever, did Virginia have as governor a man with such a fortunate combination of sound business sense, clear grasp of fundamental problems, genuine interests in moral and religious conditions, and loyalty to the Crown. Yet there have been few governors who failed as unhappily as he did in putting into effect the plans he formulated.<sup>2</sup> However, he started his colonial career auspiciously by aiding the college and the church.

The fire of 1705 had left the college without a place to meet or to house its students and faculty. Queen Anne had known of this need and sent over £ 500 from the colonial quit-rents. The large, main building was soon "rebuilt, and nicely contrived, altered and adorned by the ingenious direction of Governor Spotswood, rising Phoenix-like, revived and improved out of its own ruins."<sup>3</sup> Later two smaller brick halls were to be built, one for the Indian School

and one for the home of the President. Thus, soon after Spotswood's arrival, the college moved from its makeshift quarters in town back to its own campus.

In 1711, the college took its first step in emerging from the period in which it was only a grammar school. Governor Spotswood, anxious for William and Mary to complete her faculty and become a true college, recommended to the Board of Trustees a Mr. Tanaquil Lefevre. Mr. Lefevre was offered a position as Professor of Mathematics and Natural Philosophy at a salary of £ 80. He was a minister of the Church of England and licensed both to preach and teach in Virginia.<sup>4</sup>

Students came in increasing numbers. Let us follow the course of one of them. Young Benjamin Harrison left his family's flourishing plantation home at "Berkeley Hundred" and rode down the river road to attend his Uncle James Blair's college, probably some time during 1718.<sup>5</sup> The new scholar from Berkeley, prepared at his father's tutor school on the plantation, undoubtedly found other students at the college whose preparation was similar to his. He had studied much Latin and some Greek, a knowledge of which was considered, in eighteenth century Virginia, "an indispensable requirement of every gentlemen's education."<sup>6</sup> Though the faculty was limited to two or three masters, the college was divided into two parts. The Philosophy School was roughly equivalent to our under-graduate college and the Divinity School carried on into graduate work and

theological training.<sup>7</sup> Benjamin Harrison and his peers studied such subjects as rhetoric, logic, ethics, physics, metaphysics, and mathematics. One of their masters, the Reverend Hugh Jones, commented at some length on the college and its students.

Jones came to the college in the winter of 1716-1717. At the clergy convention in 1719, he led the opposition to the commissary.<sup>8</sup> Relations must have been strained on the campus, for Jones left for England in 1721. His book, The Present State of Virginia, published three years later, shows little love for the place. "It is now a College without a Chapel, without a scholarship and without a statute. There is a Library without books. There have been Disputes and Differences. These Things greatly impede the Progress of sciences and learned arts."

His view of the students was pessimistic, the majority being "desirous only of learning what is absolutley necessary in the shortest and best method." And later, "another thing prejudicial to the college, is the liberty allowed the scholars, and the negligent observance of college hours, and the opportunity they have of rambling abroad."<sup>9</sup> Institutions of learning change with the centuries more than the young men who attend them do.

Indians wandering around the green in front of the Wren Building must have added color if not academic luster to the college. Governor Spotswood mentioned in a letter to the Bishop of London in 1712 that there was nearly twenty Indians in attendance.<sup>10</sup> They

and their master were always a separate entity, being supported by funds from the Boyle Estate. A lovely brick building was built for them in 1723, the Brafferton.

William Byrd II wrote in 1728 of the William and Mary Indians: "And here I must lament the bad success Mr. Boyle's charity has hitherto had towards converting any of these poor heathens to Christianity. Many children of our neighboring Indians have been brought up in the College of William and Mary. They have been taught to read and write, and have been carefully instructed in the principles of the Christian religion, till they came to be men. Yet after they returned home, instead of civilizing and converting the rest, they immediately relapsed into infidelity and barbarism themselves."<sup>11</sup>

The General Assembly in 1718 showed its interest in the college by giving £ 1,000 for the scholarship fund, "for educating ingenious scholars, natives of this colony."<sup>12</sup> Again in 1726, a penny-per-gallon tax on imported liquors was levied, £ 200 of which was earmarked annually for the college to help remedy that institution's "languishing condition."<sup>13</sup> Later the full tax was turned over to the college. Finding enough money to run the college was always a difficult task for Blair.

Money was not Blair's only problem at the college. Getting along well with people had never been his forte, and he had personnel troubles. Monroe Ingles, whom he brought over with him in 1692 as master of the grammar school, charged in 1705 that Blair's interest in

the college was entirely selfish, that he was not entitled to the large salary, that he used the position as a "stalking-horse" against the governor. He claimed that the removal of Blair's nephew from the school caused others to follow suit and that one-third of the students had departed.<sup>14</sup> Ingles resigned and returned to England. But he did come back in 1716 and continued as head of the grammar school until his death in 1719.

Spotswood started his twelve-year term as Governor with good public relations with the college and its president. Differences arose later over other matters. But the enlarged college building, the Wren Building, stood as witness to Spotswood's good-will and interest in education.

Bruton Parish Church also needed a new and larger building in 1710. Spotswood, as a communicant, helped with the erection of the new edifice, "a large, strong piece of brickwork in the form of a cross, nicely regular and convenient, and adorned as the best churches in London."<sup>15</sup> He agreed to stand the expense of twenty-five feet of its length. He was clearly ingratiating himself with Dr. Blair and the colonists of gown and town.

When Spotswood arrived, Blair was still Rector of the Jamestown Church, though living in Williamsburg, some seven miles away. But in 1710 he was called to Bruton Parish Church at the capital. His regret at leaving Jamestown is shown in the following letter to the Bruton Parish Vestry:

December 4, 1710

Gentlemen:

It is true, I have so many obligations to the Parish of James City, that nothing but the urgent necessity of health, often impaired by such long winter journeys, and a fear that as age and infirmities increase, I shall not be able to attend that service (being at such a distance) so punctually as I have hitherto done, could have induced me to entertain anything as of leaving them.<sup>16</sup>

Church attendance in the early eighteenth century was still compulsory. A few were excused to worship elsewhere, but the Reverend Mr. Blair saw most of the population of Williamsburg when he looked out from his high pulpit in Bruton Parish on a Sunday morning. A bell summoned the worshippers who arrived on foot or in coaches. People stood around outside gossiping, for the church was both a social and a religious center.

Passing into the church, the men sat on the north side and the women on the southside of the aisle. The high, square boxed-in pews had narrow, uncomfortable benches. The college students sat together in one gallery and the Negro servants and slaves in another. His Excellency the Governor arrived last, taking his seat in his silk-canopied pew in the choir. The Council of State, the House of Burgesses and the Surveyor General all sat in offically assigned places. The clergyman and the congregation were all believers in order and continuity.<sup>17</sup>

The service in Bruton Parish Church did not differ materially from Anglican services in England. Both used the same

Book of Common Prayer. However, a slight but important difference between the Church of England in England and in Virginia would have been noted on a vestry-meeting night when the business of the parish was transacted. The relationship between the vestry and the clergymen was different. In England, where the bishops knew the parishes and the clergymen, it was relatively easy to fit the one to the other and induct clergymen into parishes where they would adjust. Induction meant life tenure.

In Virginia, however, the parish vestries did not know the clergymen sent over from England. There was no bishop here to adjust differences. The power of induction was given by the Crown to the Royal Governor. But vestries were cautious and adopted the expedient of asking clergymen to serve on a year-to-year basis. We shall see later how this vestry reluctance to present their clergymen for induction caused trouble.

The vestries in Colonial Virginia, as we have seen, were bodies of responsible men. The vestry book of Bruton Parish was begun in 1674, the year the parish was formed. The book covered a period of almost a hundred years, containing the minutes of the vestry meetings where all the business of the parish was carried on. The book itself has been lost but great parts of it were copied and show an interesting side of colonial life.<sup>18</sup>

Care of the church property was a continuing responsibility. Glebe lands and buildings were in constant need of repair, the church

often needed a new roof or bricks for a walkway, or a new key for the college gallery. The new building that was begun in 1710 took many pages of discussion. Labor problems beset them, too. In 1711, one of their members endeavored to "beat down the extravagant prices of workmen."<sup>19</sup> Money for the various parish projects seemed to be gathered either in kind or in cash. Barrels of tar and casks of tobacco were coin of the realm and were used to pay salaries, to purchase supplies and to pay other debts. Cash came in from parish levies on each tithable. The amount spent varied from year to year so must have been apportioned as the need arose. Poor relief was a vestry charge. But the applicant had to be a lawful resident or he was "forthwith removed out of this parish." Orphans and widows were cared for, as well as the ill and indigent.<sup>20</sup>

James Blair, as Commissary, had various differences of opinion with the clergy of the colony with whom he worked. But, as Rector of Bruton Parish, he led a peaceful life. There is no record of any discord in any of the vestry records during the more than thirty years he was in charge.<sup>21</sup> It was just when he tried to get power away from the Royal Governor that he had trouble.

Spotswood held a belief in the mercantilist theory of the day. He was an imperialist, being absolutely sure that the only excuse for the existence of the colonies was to strengthen the mother country. His letters of the Lords Commissioners of Trade and Plantations show his concern over the "lax and dishonest habits" the



Virginians had been allowed to acquire.<sup>22</sup> Letter of the law, not precedent, was to govern Spotswood's future actions. He was determined to uphold the prerogatives of the Crown, "that justice is to be done here to the King as well as to the Subjects; that the Rights of the Sovereign are not to be parted with merely because an humourous people thinks they would be more conveniently Lodged in their hands."<sup>23</sup>

Spotswood found justice moving slowly in Virginia. The General Court met only in April and October so that accused persons often spent months in prison between court sessions. To speed matters, the Governor created two additional courts of oyer and terminer to meet in June and December. By custom, judges in the higher courts were all members of the Council. Now Spotswood wanted to appoint others as judges of the new courts. Eight councillors, Blair among them, drew up a remonstrance against the governor to the Board of Trade.<sup>24</sup>

Spotswood maintained that his action was necessary if the King's position was to be upheld. The power of the governor had been "reduced to a gasp," he wrote. And unless the Council were curbed, "the haughtiness of a Carter, the hypocrisy of a Blair ... the malice of a Byrd" would rule the colony.<sup>25</sup>

The question of judges for the new courts went back and forth over the ocean until the Lords Commissioners decided that Spotswood had the power to appoint any judges he chose, but they

hoped he would use discretion in exercising it. Spotswood subsequently promised not to appoint any judges other than councillors, provided they would acknowledge his power to do so if he wanted to.<sup>26</sup> Both sides saved face but neither was happy.

The second matter in which Spotswood showed his intransigence arose over the induction of clergymen. His royal instructions stated that the governor was responsible for inducting clergymen, upon presentation of their rector by the vestry of that parish. Spotswood interpreted this to mean that he was to send clergymen to the different parishes for them to present to him for induction. Not since 1624, when Virginia became a Royal Colony, had anyone seriously questioned the right of the vestries to choose their ministers. Precedent had acquired a lawful color in 1703 when the Attorney-General had given his opinion that the selection of ministers lay in the hands of the vestries.

Blair, as Commissary, had struggled for years to improve the lot of the clergy. He had secured better salaries for them, he had improved their living conditions, and he had at times tried to get the vestries to present them for induction. But never once had he, or anyone else, even questioned the right of the vestries to choose their own rectors. So the demand of Governor Spotswood that the parishes recognize his right to send them ministers was an unwelcome innovation. He had been quite correct when he had stated, in an early letter from Virginia, that the people wanted power "more conveniently lodged in their hands."<sup>27</sup> Self-government for the colonies

was still a thought a long ways off, but it had its roots in such struggles as this one.

This question of power came to a head when the governor forced two clergymen into parishes whose vestries had each voted to ask someone else. At a clergy conference, called in 1719 at the request of the Bishop of London to discuss the welfare of the church, the struggle was openly bitter. Spotswood had some clergy on his side. Blair had some clergy backing him. All the vestries, of course, were against the governor, but they were at home and their voices were not heard.<sup>28</sup>

To weaken Blair and his power, Spotswood hit out at the Commissary's one uncertain claim to power, his ordination into the Church of Scotland. A bishop had performed the ceremony, but the Scottish Church had been Presbyterian, not Episcopal, in 1679. This question was never settled. Blair refused to discuss it.<sup>29</sup> Spotswood, in a fit of understandable exasperation, once called Blair "that old combustion."<sup>30</sup>

Blair needed a trial case to regain his former power and to restore that of the vestries. The convention of the clergymen in 1719 had generated only heat, no light. So he made his own situation a test case. He had been the minister of Bruton Parish for almost ten years but had never been inducted. The vestry had voted in a vestry meeting in 1695 not to call a rector on any other basis than yearly contract: "whoever shall be admitted as minister in this

parish shall have no induction."<sup>31</sup> But they now reversed themselves in view of the governor's attack upon their right to choose their own rector, and presented Blair himself for induction. The already incensed governor refused.

The ensuing fracas must have involved everyone in the colony. Conflicting legal opinions came from two legal authorities in London.<sup>32</sup> The Council discussed it heatedly.<sup>33</sup> The House of Burgesses decided the issue affected every parish in the colony and they voted to employ a lawyer to prosecute the case before the General Court.<sup>34</sup> Both sides threatened, no matter who won, to appeal to the King. But the matter never came to a judicial head.

The Privy Council must have been alarmed by the confusing reports coming in from Virginia. The simplest solution seemed to be to remove the governor and return to the status quo ante. It is interesting to note that the Privy Council had the first-hand advice of James Blair to guide them. That ubiquitous gentleman just happened to be in London in 1722 when the decision to remove Spotswood was made. Throughout all this controversy over the induction of clergymen, Commissary Blair stands out as the local St. George against the Dragon of Royal power across the ocean.

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## CHAPTER V

## PEACE AND PROGRESS IN LATER YEARS

The ecclesiastical power of Commissary Blair was in eclipse only once--the interval in 1724 between the death of Bishop John Robinson (and the automatic lapse of the commissarial commission) and the decision of Bishop Edmund Gibson, his successor, to ask the King to renew the said commission. Blair wrote the new Bishop, urging him to hurry up with the commission because two unworthy clergymen were taking advantage of him. He proposed to hold an investigation of the conduct of these two men who had been accused of scandalous behavior, and if the charges were proven he proposed "to proceed to suspension of their license, which is only during the bishop's pleasure."<sup>1</sup>

However, Bishop Gibson was a thorough executive and he wanted to check on affairs before making any decision concerning the commissary. Lines of communication between London and Virginia were well open by 1724, so that the bishop could easily check on reports by and about his colonial representative.

He had the recently published account of the colony, The Present State of Virginia by the Reverend Hugh Jones who had been in Virginia five years as professor at the college, rector at Jamestown, and Chaplain of the General Assembly.<sup>2</sup> Jones made a careful analysis of the church and wrote a detailed description of its

workings. The clergy, the parishes, the church buildings, the vestries, the church schools, the financial status are all described "for the encouragement and intelligence of such good clergymen and others as are inclinable to go and settle there." Among his suggestions was the appointment of a church leader who would have more power than a commissary but less than a bishop. "He might be called Dean of Virginia."<sup>3</sup>

Bishop Gibson also had the report of the new Lieutenant-Governor, Major Hugh Drysdale, to guide him in judging Blair. Drysdale wrote to him in 1724, "on the relation of the state of the Church and Clergy in this dominion.... Your Lordship's Commissary on whose truth and integrity I assure your Lordship may entirely depend. He has discharged that trust with an unblemished reputation under the Commission of many of your Lordship's predecessors, and to their great satisfaction. Yet this behavior cannot secure him from the assaults of ill tongues, whose malignity brings innocence itself into suspicion, and makes the truth difficult to be known by those who have prepossessed by ill."<sup>4</sup> Drysdale only lived a few years after his arrival in Virginia, his short term of office being one of harmony.

Parochial reports were sent to Bishop Gibson in 1724 in answer to his questionnaire. These reports give another picture of church life in Virginia. There were forty-eight parishes in the colony, fifteen of which were vacant at the time. Thus the twenty-eight clergy who replied represented almost all of the churches.<sup>5</sup>



The average length of time served by the clergy responding to the questionnaire was twenty-five years in the colony, with an average of twenty-one years in their present parishes. Only one clergyman was known to have moved to another colony to better his lot. Only five of these men had been inducted. The parishes were large in size and small in number of souls by comparison with English standards. The average parish was twenty miles square and served 150 families. The parishes often had two or more church buildings within their bounds, all under the same rector. Bishop Gibson is not known to have commented on the state of church affairs as shown by these reports, but he made no drastic changes.

The very great difficulty of the church throughout the whole colonial period was that it existed simply as a group of separate parishes with no center of life and unity around which a corporate life could grow.<sup>6</sup> Blair had not been given power to effect this unity. But he did keep communication alive between the parishes by calling convocations. And he did coordinate their functioning by getting regulations passed by the House of Burgesses. There are no records of his personal relationships with either the clergy or the vestries, but they must have been many. By his long life and his forceful personality, he must have lent an air of continuity and power to the Virginia Church.

Our Saviour's Sermon on the Mount, in four volumes, contained one hundred and seventeen of Blair's sermons. Published first in

1722, it ran through at least two editions. The modern dictum that "no soul is saved after the first twenty minutes" would have horrified both clergy and laity in the early eighteenth century. So these sermons make pretty heavy reading today.<sup>7</sup>

Blair was a faithful reprover of sin, struggling to make his hearers mindful of their duty to God. In a sermon on swearing he warned, "The time is coming that the tares must be separated from the wheat; and they shall be cast with the evil—the devil who loved them—into hell; but the angels shall carefully gather the wheat into God's barn." And, in denouncing flashy dress, he assured his congregation, "It is not the outward gaudy beauty that he values, but the ornaments of the mind—Christian graces and virtues—which, in his sight, are of great price."<sup>8</sup> It can be supposed that the new bishop did not find the incumbent commissary wanting in zeal or oratorical ability. Blair's commission was renewed.

Blair's leadership in the church having been assured by the new commission, he was free to continue the building up of the college. He had been gradually strengthening its faculty and adding to its student body. Finally the provisions of the charter were complied with: six masters and a hundred students, more or less, in the grammar school and college combined. James Blair made his last trip to England in 1726 to see the transfer of the ownership of the college property from the Board of Trustees appointed by the Crown in 1693 to the president and faculty.<sup>9</sup>

The only obstacle to the proper and immediate transfer was Blair's old enemy, Sir Francis Nicholson, who refused to sign the papers. Nicholson, Blair and the Reverend Stephen Fouace were the surviving members of the original board of visitors. Since the transfer involved real estate, the formal deed of sale required all three signatures. The college had to wait three years for Nicholson to die.<sup>10</sup>

February 27, 1729 is the date on the Transfer, but it was actually August 15, 1729 before "the transfer of the corporate authority...was completed."<sup>11</sup> August 16, 1729 is the earliest written record we have of college business. Earlier records were burned or lost. It is interesting to note that the first order of business for the President and six faculty members was the subscribing to the Thirty-nine Articles of the Church of England and the Oath De Fidei Administratione.<sup>12</sup>

The first full-time Professor of Divinity was appointed in that same year. In that appointment Blair saw the beginning of his dream for a colonial-trained clergy come true. It would be years before the college could supply the need for clergymen, so Lieutenant-Governor William Gooch made the plea to the Bishop of London in 1729, "The great want we are in of ministers, my Lord, many parishes being vacant....My Lord, the Laity all over this Province are so well inclined to Religion and Vertue, that 'tis great pity they should want Instruction to help them forward in their Duty."<sup>13</sup>

No longer did young men need to go to England for ministerial training. There are no records to tell how many of Virginia's clergymen were born and educated here. But the fact that they could be so trained gave the colonial church a measure of independence formerly lacking. But they still had to go to London to be ordained. The Governor once reported to the Bishop, "The Gentlemen your Lordship was pleased to ordain are returned to this country, and in their several parishes have behaved themselves to the satisfaction of us here, and suitable to your Lordship's hopes."<sup>14</sup> Bishop Meade, the church historian, asserts, "It is positively affirmed by those most competent to speak that the best ministers were those educated at the college."<sup>15</sup>

Blair was trying in many ways to move power across the ocean. Training in leadership was a sound basis for power. His college helped supply that training to many colonial leaders. Two years after Blair's death in 1743, Lieutenant-Governor Gooch declared, "There is not in any Part of the World, a College where good order, Decency and Discipline are better maintain'd, where God Almighty is more constantly and devoutly worshipp'd and where greater care is taken to train up young students in the Rudiments of Religion, Loyalty, Science and Good Manners...than in this."<sup>16</sup>

William Gooch was the only royal governor who did not have some struggle for power with Blair. He was appointed in 1726 upon the death of Hugh Drysdale, Lieutenant-Governor for only four

years. At the time of Gooch's appointment, Blair was in London on college business. There are no records to show that Blair had anything to do with the appointment, but, if he had, it would not have been the first time. He would have been acting out of character had he not offered suggestions as to choice of governor.

"There is a perfect understanding betwixt him and me; and that makes all things easy both with Clergy and Laity," wrote Blair to the probably astonished Bishop of London on October 28, 1727.<sup>17</sup> Gooch officially kept on excellent terms with the aging commissary. Only his private letters to his brother, Thomas, Bishop of Norwich, show what his real feelings were. "I have done all myself hitherto, and rule without any particular favourite, which is not liked by the Commissary who used to Govern. He is an unaccountable spark, hated abominably by all men but his countrymen, and when he can't advise nor direct, he's inclined to perplex, but as yet we are good Friends and I intend to keep it so if I can, which will be difficult."<sup>18</sup>

Later the same year, Gooch wrote, "The Commissary is a very vile old fellow but he does not know that I am sensible of it, being still in appearance good friends. Unless he has all and does all, he is not satisfied, and if he did, very few in this country besides himself would be so."<sup>19</sup> In spite of these feelings, Gooch kept on good terms with Blair.

That the Commissary still had control over the clergy is shown in a report made by Gooch to the Bishop of London in 1738. "Mr. Smith has chose rather to surrender his Parish, than to submit himself to an Hearing in the Commissary's Court: he was charged with Grievous Crimes, and is such a sott, and so weak in mind as well as body, that he is neither fitt nor able to Serve a Cure."<sup>20</sup>

James Blair spent his last days in quiet. Still rector of Bruton Parish Church, he held services regularly there. He was still commissary but we have little record of any activity other than letter writing, mostly to the Bishop of London. He was still a member of the Governor's Council but there is little in the journals other than a "Yea" or Naye." And he was President of the college for his life-time. College affairs went smoothly after the transfer of legal power in 1729, Blair assuming the role of elder statesman now that days of controversy were over. He lived in the handsome brick President's House, begun in 1732, and from its vantage point right beside the college gate, he watched the comings and goings at the college.

A beautiful chapel, attached to the main building, had been completed in 1732. Blair wrote to the Bishop of London, "Our Chapel in the College is now finished, and we have prayers in it morning and evening."<sup>21</sup> In reference to the chapel and to Bruton Parish Church, it has been written, "Williamsburg was once the miniature copy of the Court of St. James, somewhat aping the manners of

that royal place, while the old church grave-yard and the college chapel were the Westminster Abbey and the St. Paul's of London, where the great ones were interred."<sup>22</sup>

Blair was an old man of eighty-four in 1740, but he was not too old for one more bout. Governor Gooch had been called to lead a military expedition outside the colony. In his absence, James Blair, as senior member of the Council and president of that body, became acting governor of the colony for ten months. Some years before William Byrd II had raised objection to the eligibility of a clergyman for the presidency and temporary governorship, even though the law stated that the government should devolve upon the eldest councillor in case of emergency.<sup>23</sup> So Blair, insisting on his rights, stayed on until Gooch returned, even though Byrd again objected.<sup>24</sup> Byrd had been a member of the Council since 1708 but became president himself only upon Blair's death, holding that position of honor for just a year, until his death.

Nothing of importance transpired in those months of Blair's temporary political elevation. The position carried with it social duties, and we have record of his being host at the annual King's Birthday Ball in the capital. William Byrd reported that "the President entertained well."<sup>25</sup> Gooch found affairs in good order upon his return, writing to his brother, "The Virginians were mightily rejoiced at my Return, Day and Night firing Guns, Bonfires and Illuminations." He added the tongue-in-cheek comment, "the good Commissary

kept believing he should never see me again."<sup>26</sup>

The William Byrd who objected to Blair's assumption of power in 1740 was the same man who had taken Andros' side against Blair in the bitter contest for power at Lambeth in 1696. So it is pleasant to read that these two men became friends in later life. Byrd's diary mentions dining peacefully with Blair often between 1739 (when the diary begins) and 1741 (when the diary ends). They seemed to have dined on such mild foods as "boiled milk" and "boiled mutton."<sup>27</sup> No wonder they did not argue!

Able executor that he was, Gooch anticipated the day when a new Commissary would be sent over to Virginia. Gooch wrote the Bishop of London a long letter on the subject in 1737. Rumor had come to him that a certain young lawyer, Waggoner, was suggested that his father, a clergyman in England, would like to be the next Commissary. Gooch had inquired about him and found him "much better remembered as a bad painter, than a Divine." However, the Governor suggested, "But if we here might be allowed to name, our Philosophy Professor Mr. Dawson, is the man." He wrote fully of Dawson's qualifications and stated, "And I make no question, on the first occasion after the Commissary's Death, he will be unanimously Elected President of the College, and have his Parish."<sup>28</sup> In a later letter announcing Blair's death, Gooch told of Dawson's "being by the unanimous vote of the Visitors elected President of William and Mary



College, as good a Testimonial of his Merit as Your Lordship could receive from Hence."<sup>29</sup> Dawson was also unanimously elected minister of Bruton Parish Church.<sup>30</sup> Subsequently, Bishop Gibson appointed him Commissary.

"Old Blair died last month," wrote William Gooch to his brother in 1743, "in his 88th year, and to the great comfort of his nephew, his Heir, has left £ 10,000 behind him. A Rupture he has had for above 40 years concealed from every Body but one friend, mortified and killed him. . If his Belly had been as sound as his Head and Breast, he might have lived many years longer."<sup>31</sup> But he had lived out a span of life longer and more laborious than most men.

Quest for power had been the main spring of James Blair's life. Personal power always dies with a man, but power that a man gets for an institution or group lives on. There were institutions and groups in colonial Virginia that were stronger in 1743 when James Blair died than they had been in 1684 when he landed in the colony. And they were stronger partly because he had been concerned with them.

The Church of England in Virginia was really a Virginia Church by 1743. True, its members were un-confirmed. Its clerical candidates had to go to London for ordination, although many were trained at the College of William and Mary. But the power of the organization remained localized in the church vestries. The church was thereby stronger and more ready to stand alone in the days after 1776.

The college was a going concern. It had been many years before a real college was established. But Blair never forgot it and kept working for the goal of a college to train Virginia men for Virginia leadership. Thus the origins of the men who were finally to win power for the colony from the Crown were to be in the colony itself.

The colony was also stronger because James Blair had been a member of the Governor's Council for forty-nine years. Royal instructions were still given to the governors, but each succeeding governor must have realized that his power to carry them out was becoming less and less. James Blair was there for many years to remind him if he forgot. The Governor's Council was gradually taking over the governor's power. It was not a democratic movement for power that Blair led, but it was a shift of power across the ocean.

Virginia owes a debt to James Blair--contentious, autocratic, greedy for power and wealth but still honest, hard-working and a believer in the future of Virginia. The Virginia he envisioned was powerful and he helped make it so.

Perhaps he did not view himself as others did. It is said that he wrote his own epitaph<sup>32</sup> which stands today on the weather-smoothed tombstone in the old Jamestown Churchyard. A free translation of the Latin memorial gives us James Blair as he saw himself.

Here lies buried

The Reverend and Honorable

James Blair, A. M.,

who was born in Scotland, was educated in the College of Edinburgh, and emigrated to England, and thence to Virginia, in which colony he spent fifty-eight years as an Evangelist, Deacon, and Priest of the Church of England, and fifty-four years as Commissary of the Bishop of London. He was the founder and first President of William and Mary College, a member of the Council, and subsequently its President; and as such in the absence of the representative of the King, the Governor of the Colony.

He sustained his various offices with the approbation of his fellowmen, while he illustrated in his life those graces which adorn the Christian character.

He had a handsome person, and in the family circle blended cheerfulness with piety.

He was a generous friend to the poor, and was prompt in lending assistance to all who needed it.

He was a liberal benefactor of the College during his life; and at his death bequeathed to it his library, with the hope that his books, which were mostly religious, might lead the student to those things which lead to salvation.

He died on the \_\_\_\_ day of the Calends of May . . . in the year 1743, aged eighty-eight years, exhibiting to the last those graces which make old age lovely, and lamented by all, especially by his nephews, who have reared this stone to commemorate those virtues which will long survive the marble that records them.<sup>33</sup>

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