THE COCK-FIGHTER.

AN UNPUBLISHED POEM BY FRANCIS HOPKINSON.

One of the most interesting collections of historical documents in this country is that owned by the well-known illustrator, Mrs. Florence Scovel Shinn, of New York. She is a granddaughter of Judge Joseph Hopkinson, a very prominent political, literary and social figure in Philadelphia during the first quarter of the nineteenth century; a great-granddaughter of Francis Hopkinson, a friend of Washington, Jefferson, and Franklin, and himself distinguished, not only in his native city but throughout the country, as a jurist, statesman, scientist, inventor, artist, musician, poet, and essayist; and a great-great-granddaughter of Thomas Hopkinson, a friend of Benjamin Franklin, a Provincial Councillor of Pennsylvania, and one of the founders of the American Philosophical Society and the College of Philadelphia,—now the University of Pennsylvania. From these distinguished ancestors Mrs. Shinn has inherited, not only a great amount of historical material written by themselves but letters and other documents in the hand-writing of almost every other American of any consequence who lived between 1750 and 1850.

One of the most interesting documents of this collection is the original manuscript of the poems and essays of Francis Hopkinson, most of which were published in the Philadelphia press and later printed in the three-volume collection of his works, published in 1792.

While examining this manuscript some time ago, the author of this article found a poem, which, so far as
he has been able to discover, has never before been published. This amusing bit of doggerel, which is entitled "The Cock-Fighter, an Elegy," runs as follows:

"Ah me! what means this cackling all around?
Hen cries to Hen & Chicken shrilly sound;
A Father these, those mourn a Husband dead,
By cruel Hands to bloody Battle led.

"See from N—— Y—— D—— comes in state,
And twenty fighting Cocks around him wait,
All arm'd with steel & ready for the War—
Chicks fly amaz'd & Hens the Sight abhor.

"From yonder Barn sad sounds salute mine Ear,
And thus methinks the Notes of Woe I hear:
'CURS'd be the Hour that bro't him to this place,
That savage Foe to all our harmless Race!

"'Attend my little Brood, & whilst I sing,
Oh gather close beneth my shelt'ring Wing!
A Father you, a Husband I deplore—
D—— came, & Dicky is no more.

"'At Yester-Morn, while yet the Morn was grey,
My Dicky rose and hail'd the rising Day:
Ah, what avail'd his Voice so clear & shrill,
His glossy Neck, gay Plumage, polish'd Bill.

"'Or coral Comb that grac'd his lofty Head,
Or cockly Strut when forth our Train he led?
For ere the Sun to hastening Night could yield,
Poor Dicky lay, all mangled, on the Field.

"'Thus are we left—Oh barb'rous Sport of Men!
Poor Orphans you, And I a widow'd Hen.
Is't not enough our harmless Race must bleed
To crown your Feasts, ev'n luxury to feed?

"That ere our pretty Cocklings learn to crow,
To pamper Lust they must to Market go?
But will you thus, on fatal Mischief bent,
For our destruction cruel Sports invent?

"'Hence! hence away, & leave this bloody Plan,
Pursue some nobler purpose, worthy Man!
Think'st thou that Heav'n was to thy' Fortunes kind,
Gave Wealth & Pow'r, gave an immortal Mind,
“With boasted Reason, & a* ruling Hand
To make thee first Cock-Fighter in the Land?
With crimson Dye our blood shall spot thy Fame
And Chickens yet unhatch’d shall curse D——’s Name.’

The reader will observe that the division between the last two stanzas is a rather awkward and arbitrary one. As originally written, the ninth stanza ended with the couplet

“Thy country calls thee,—on her welfare wait;
Go soothe the disorders of her troubled State.”

but this the author crossed out and replaced with the lines quoted above. This clumsy conclusion tends to strengthen the supposition that the verses were never published, for, while Hopkinson was not a great poet, he was too careful a workman and too skilful a versifier to allow these stanzas as they appear here to go into print.

The political bearing of the deleted lines; the disguised name, D——; and the footnote at the end all seem to indicate that we have here, not only an interesting specimen of early humanitarian literature, but a good-natured bit of satire directed at some prominent individual: and it may be of some historical interest to try to establish the identity of the person against whom the attack is made.

By, scanning the various lines in which D——’s name appears, we find that it must be a word of three syllables, accented on the second. N—— Y——, according to metre and common sense, can hardly be anything but New York. With these deductions and Hopkinson’s note to help us, we turn to the records of the New York Colonial Assembly for the years just preceding 1770, the date of the poem, and find there only one name which begins with D and fulfills our metrical requirements, and that is the name DeLancy. This, 1770.  "He was a member of Assembly."
of course, would settle the matter, were it not that there were three different DeLancys in the Assembly between 1765 and 1770. Moreover, the entire clan seems to have been celebrated for its fondness for horse-racing, cock-fighting, and kindred sports, so that the epithet "Cock-Fighter" will not serve to identify any particular one of them.

John DeLancy succeeded his father, Peter DeLancy, as a member of the New York Assembly in 1767; but since the former was very young at that time, and since the latter died in 1770, neither of them is so likely to be the man satirized by Hopkinson as one of their relatives, Captain James DeLancy, son of the Lieutenant-Governor, and one of the wealthiest, as well as one of the ablest men of the province. He was elected to the Assembly in 1767 and remained active in New York politics until the outbreak of the Revolution, when he fled to England. Like most of his family he was attainted and deprived of his estate for his Loyalist activities. This, then, is probably the personage who came to Philadelphia in 1770, with his twenty fighting-cocks, armed with steel, and brought on himself the ridicule of the humane and kindly poet.