Lieutenant Colonel George Vallandigham.

BY DR. EDWARD NOBLE VALLANDIGHAM.

Lieutenant Colonel George Vallandigham is a long forgotten colonial and early national soldier of Pennsylvania's Western frontier, long more than locally known as a skilled and daring leader in the Indian wars that for twenty years hindered the settlement and civilization of the hither West. He was descended, probably in the third generation, from Michael Van Landeghem, a Protestant from French Flanders, who fled from persecution doubtless in the local district of Belgium that still bears his name, about the middle of the Seventeenth century, and arrived in Virginia after tarrying fifteen years in England and Wales. Many of the name still live in Belgium, and one of them, a business man of Antwerp recalls that his great-grandfather is said to have insisted that he had kinsmen in America, doubtless the immigrant Michael and his family. Efforts to trace the family back to the knight of the name who commanded a body of knights under the Lion of Flanders at the Battle of the Golden Spurs, the victory of the Flemish burghers over the French chivalry at Courtrai in 1302, have failed, though many of the name in simple and humble occupations were found by the investigator—a not unusual experience of Americans in the search for traditional ancestors of mediæval fame.

Michael Van Landieghom must have reached Virginia not later than 1668, for he was one of many aliens naturalized in 1673 under a law of the Old Dominion passed in 1668 and authorizing naturalization for persons five years resident. The "denization" of Augustine Hermann in the Palatinate of Maryland in 1666
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is conjectured by John Fiske, in his Old Virginia and Her Neighbors, to have been the earliest instance of naturalization in the colonies; but it is possible that "denization" conferred something less than naturalization upon Hermann and family, and that full naturalization was not accorded until 1674, when Hermann’s map of Maryland was published, a map that Lord Baltimore declared the best ever made, as well he might have thought it, for the obliging Hermann included within the boundaries of Maryland, not only Delaware and the Eastern Shore of Maryland, but a long and handsome strip of what is now Pennsylvania, extending to a point North of Philadelphia, as it was in Penn’s day.

The immigrant Fleming became a lessee of land included in the huge tract granted for thirty-one years to the vicious Lord Culpeper, afterward the discredited Governor of Virginia. Perhaps Michæl Van Landerghem lacked funds to buy a landed estate, or Culpeper, under the terms of his grant, could not alienate any of the land, though he managed somehow to leave to his heirs a huge landed estate in Virginia, which came in due time to Lord Thomas Fairfax, neighbor and patron of the precocious youth George Washington, when he lived with his half-brother at Mt. Vernon. Fairfax made George at sixteen the surveyor of his vast holdings, and paid him handsomely for his services.

George Vallandigham was born in 1737 or 1738 in Fairfax county, not far from Alexandria. He was probably the great-grandson of the immigrant, for his father Michael Vallandigham, was born in 1706, and was almost certainly the son of one of the first Michael’s sons. No doubt the grandfather of George Vallandigham had changed the name to a form less patently foreign, because foreign names were disadvantageous in colonial Virginians. The Virginians,
after a custom inherited from English ancestors, who were and are prone to modify difficult names, pronounced the anglicized form of the name Van Landeghem as Flannagan. All over Virginia the name is still thus pronounced, as in much of the South and South-west to which men of the blood have penetrated, but the whole tribe in whichever of half a dozen spellings they use, steadily refuse to call themselves Flannagan. The Virginian took a like liberty with the Italian name Tagliaferro (Iron-cutter) and it is usually spelled and pronounced Tolliver.

Perhaps George Vallandigham, although his father, as merely a respected and prosperous farmer, hardly frequented the Washington-Fairfax circle, had heard that the strapping youth of sixteen at Mt. Vernon earned twenty dollars a day as Lord Fairfax's surveyor. At any rate, after obtaining the best general education that Virginia then provided for the sons of farmers, he studied surveying, and doubtless practised the art, one much in demand, and well paid. But we hear more of his occupation as a teacher in the high schools of Virginia and Maryland. He taught in a high school of Prince Georges County, Maryland in 1768, and about 1771 married Elizabeth, daughter of Col. Joseph Noble, of Charles County, doubtless an officer of the Palatinate militia.

Possibly matters were not going quite well at the Noble plantation. There is a tradition that two of the family connection grew rich out of the slave trade, and withdrew with their ill gotten gains to England. Maryland had been settled and civilized for nearly a century and a half, and good land was no doubt scarce and high. At any rate George Vallandigham and his brother-in-law, Richard Noble, toiled far across Maryland and through the mountainous wilderness to a region that they supposed permanent territory of Virginia, though it was eventually included within Penn-
sylvania. Here in what is now South Fayette Township, Allegheny County, they bought 1000 acres of land, a dozen miles or more from Fort Pitt, and here they built a rude cabin, doubtless of logs, and gave at least a year and possibly considerably more to bringing part of their land under plow, and making the new home habitable for those whom they had left behind in comfortable Maryland.

Returning to Maryland, probably before 1773, they conducted to the frontier Col. Noble and his wife, the many slaves of the Nobles, and the wife of George Vallandigham, with whatever children there may have been, and probably the wife and child or children of Richard Noble. The newcomers were sheltered after some more or less crude fashion. It was a fashion not to the liking of Col. Noble, for when asked, on his journey back to Maryland to visit his brother, where he lived, he answered: "I don't live at all; I breathe on Robinson's Run." The little settlement was called Noblestown. It is now a post village of about 600 inhabitants.

The frontier plantation was a scene of hardship and terror during a considerable part of Col. Noble's residence there, and probably up to his death in 1780, aged 65, at the home of his brother in Charles County. When the two young men built their cabin the Indians of the region were mainly peaceful, under the influence of that friend of the whites, Chief John Logan. In 1770 he had removed beyond the Ohio, and was then or sometime thereafter chosen chief of the Mingo tribe. Even this honor, and Logan's growing fondness for the white man's firewater did not alter his friendship to the settlers. But in April, 1774, some whites led by one Greathouse, a whiskey seller, murdered kinfolk of Logan's on Yellow Creek. Logan wild with rage, brought together his warriors, and began a succession of hideous outrages, thus bringing on "Dunmore's War."
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Lord Dunmore, the last royal governor of Virginia, promptly recruited about 3000 militia, and sending his second in command, that brilliant Scotch Irishman, Brigadier General Andrew Lewis, born in George Washington's year of 1732, with 1300 men to watch for the savages, went himself to Fort Pitt with a strong detachment to reenforce Lewis at need. Under a change of orders from Dunmore, Lewis encountered the savages unexpectedly at Point Pleasant, on the Ohio, about twenty-five miles from Noblestown, and defeated them after one of the most bitterly contested battles in the history of the frontier.

It is not certainly known whether or not George Vallandigham took part in the battle of Point Pleasant, but it seems more probable that he was with Dunmore, for Dunmore is believed to have conferred upon him his military rank and title. Years afterward he was commissioned by the Governor of Pennsylvania to raise and command a body of troops for use against the Indians, and in this official order was addressed by his title.

There was rather short respite after the defeat of Logan in the Spring of 1774, for with the oncoming of the War for Independence, the Indians became the allies of the British; and now began George Vallandigham's long service as a local soldier in the ruthless struggle between red barbarism and white civilization. This service ended only with Wayne's victory over the Indians in August, 1794.

Wayne's treaty with the Indians in 1795 bound the beaten enemy to hunt no more South of the Ohio. It has been rather boldly conjectured that the victory of 1774 at Point Pleasant, as granting a season of peace to the immediate frontier, and promoting the rapid settlement of the region, may have prevented the British from insisting at the treaty of 1783 that our Western boundary be drawn at the Alleghanies. Be that as it may, throughout the Revolutionary War, and
long after, the little settlement at Noblestown was harried again and again by the Indians, so that the settlers were in almost constant dread. The Vallandighams, Nobles and their neighbors had to be ready for the fray at almost any moment. They sowed and reaped their crops with armed sentinels on watch, while those not thus on the post of danger worked in the fields. Sentinels were sometimes shot on post, and that all might share the danger, as also the labor of the fields, these two duties were subject to frequent shifts. In the midst of these perils and labors, five children were born to George Vallandigham, between September, 1772, and June, 1789. During part of his career as soldier and farmer he practised law at Pittsburg, served as a justice of the peace, and was active in politics. One of the sons, George, became an officer of the Ohio militia in the war of 1812, and another was The Rev. Clement Vallandigham, for thirty-two years pastor of the Presbyterian Church at New Lisbon (now Lisbon) in Columbiana county, Ohio.

Milton McClelland, a lawyer of Pittsburg, grandson of George Vallandigham, writing to his first cousin, Clement Laird Vallandigham of Ohio, in March, 1849, gives interesting and minute details of their grandfather’s career, person, and character, evidently learned from a contemporary of Col. Vallandigham, for he lived at the homestead until 1810. By that time doubtless the sons and daughters, except the youngest of the latter, were living elsewhere; but this youngest daughter, Milton McClelland’s mother, Elizabeth Vallandigham, was born in 1789, and she was living at sixty when his letter was written. He describes his grandfather as rather more than six feet in height, with light brown hair, blue eyes, and aquiline nose. He was a skilled mathematician, and acquainted with navigation, and with the physical sciences as then taught in the colleges. Tradition describes him as
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graceful, fond of dancing, of singularly gracious manners.

In 1779 George Vallandigham accompanied Col. Daniel Broadhead on the punitive expedition up the Allegheny River, sent out to burn the Indian towns in that region, whence the savages issued forth to ravage the settlements. He was again with Broadhead in 1781, when he attacked the Delaware Indians of the Muskingum River region in Eastern Ohio. Such expeditions involved long marches in rough country with the constant danger of ambush. From one such he returned home after an absence of many weeks so worn with hardship and ill from rheumatism, that he was confined to his bed for some months.

It was the custom of the settlement about Nobles-town that the women and children of the somewhat widely scattered families take refuge at one or another house that seemed likely to guarantee their safety. Conditions became so menacing at one time that the women and children of the Vallandighams and Nobles were sent for a year and half to a settlement twenty miles or more South of Noblestown. No Summer passed without Indian forays. There were times when the family deserting the house at dead of night, scattering in various directions, and hiding singly or in couples, in the thickets, did not return home until broad daylight. An infant son of six months was saved by a sister who hid with him all night in the thicket.

These times of terror were such a strain upon the nerves of the settlers that even so steady a man as George Vallandigham seems to have been superstitiously accepted as a premonition of peril a dream in which he saw a turkey cock suddenly spring into the air with outstretched neck and loud cries, seeking safety in flight. Next day he was extremely careful to watch for indications of an early attack. This was in the
Summer of 1782. Others were uneasy, and on that morning Henry Potter’s daughter Isabella was invited to tarry at the Vallandigham house; but she declined because she had stayed there at the time of the last Indian foray. So she went to the house of a neighbor, Lewis Clock. When Mrs. Clock, who had been preparing dinner, went out at midday to call the men from the fields, she saw a band of Indians rapidly approaching. As a matter of fact the Indians, hearing the sound of the axe from a piece of woodland where the men of the household were at work, fell upon them, killed and scalped them. On nearing the house the savages killed six of the Clock children at play in the yard. They entered the house, whence Phoebe Clock and Isabella Potter had fled, bringing with them Isabella whom they had captured. They then tied the women, and ate the dinner prepared for the men. Being in haste, as usual with the savages, whose raids were seldom more than affairs of half an hour or less, they fled, with the women as prisoners. Mrs. Clock took with her a babe at the breast, but the Indians, apparently fearing that its cries would guide those in pursuit, dashed its brains out against a tree.

Col. Vallandigham, Major Kydd and the Poe brothers, Adam and Andrews, rallied all the men that could safely be spared from the settlement, and set out in pursuit of the savages. The chase took them to Georgetown, on the East bank of the Ohio; but realizing that their force was not strong enough to justify their entering the Indian country across the river, they returned home, stopping to bury the dead body of Mrs. Clock’s infant. Such a massacre was an unusual horror at Noblestown, but the settlers were in constant fear of rifle, torch and scalping knife.

When the “Whiskey Insurrection” threatened, Lt. Col. Vallandigham found himself in opposition to his two sons, George of eighteen years, and Clement of
sixteen. These precocious youths were heartily, and almost violently for the insurrection. The father, with the conservatism of age, but without its undue caution, was promptly outspoken in opposition to the armed resistance of the excise law that seemed inevitable. The insurgents threatened to burn his house, as they had burned that of an exciseman not far away. He was warned that if he appeared and spoke at a meeting in opposition to the insurrection he should risk his life. He went to the meeting, spoke his mind freely, and came home unscathed. Doubtless his conduct upon that occasion prevented his election to Congress, though it was also conjectured that he owed his defeat to his refusal to furnish the customary barrel of whiskey to the electors.

Col. Vallandigham's last fifteen years of life or more seem to have been peaceful. He continued his practice of law, no doubt, at Pittsburg and in at least one other county town. Before his death at seventy-two or three he saw his sons and daughters married and well settled in life, except perhaps one of the daughters who seems to have been living at the homestead when he died, though she must have married soon after. None of the name now live at the little village of Noblestown, but a few of the blood are still there, though the homestead has vanished or can not be identified.