

# Something About the Celebrated Jennings Family.

By Rev. Canon Smith, R.D.



JOHN CHURCHILL, the great Duke of Marlborough, married Sarah Jennings, who was first "Lady in Waiting" and afterwards Mistress of the Robes to Queen Anne. She was a very handsome woman and decidedly imperious in temper and deportment. This Duchess of Marlborough had a near relation, probably a brother—named Robert Jennens or Jennings—the name is spelt in either form. This Robert Jennings was an army officer and Aide-de-Camp to the great Duke. Robert had a son named John. John who was born in 1701, had an illustrious godfather in the person of King William the Third. After John's death there was found at Acton Place a large solid silver bowl—with his name engraven thereon—together with a statement that the bowl was a present from the King at his godson's christening.

John Jennings was never married although he lived to extreme old age. He was a miser—and by his parsimonious habits contrived before his death to amass the immense sum of two million two hundred thousand pounds, sterling, in hard cash, besides a large amount of landed estate. His longevity contributed not a little to this millionaire's wealth. In his early life Tontine's were in vogue. Their name was derived from Laurence Tonti—a Neapolitan—and in those days Tontines meant loans given for life annuities, with benefit of survivorship. They were first heard of in Paris during Cardinal Mazarin's administration. His Eminence was most desirous to divert the attention of the people from the increasing embarrassments of the State; so, to amuse the Parisians, he favoured right and left the establishment of Tontines. The bait took; every body wanted to become suddenly rich. One of these schemes was started in England in £100 shares. To this Tontine Mr. Jennings became an original subscriber. It was a most successful hit for he survived all his brother shareholders. For a lengthened period his one hundred pounds produced him no less than three thousand pounds per annum. He held it until he was over the century mark in age. There was hardly a public security in which he had not a large investment. He died intestate and the greater amount of his property went to wealthy relations and did not benefit the people he intended most to benefit thereby, and that was his poor relations. One of John's relatives was a Miss Jennings, who in 1761 was a "Lady in Waiting" to Queen Charlotte, wife of King George the Third. In that year this Miss Jennings who was a court beauty eloped with a very handsome Captain of the King's Guards named Pottle. They ran away to Newfoundland. Had they been caught the punishment, for the bridegroom at least would have been serious, for he had not only eloped with a Ward of the King but also deserted from his regiment.

Captain and Miss Pottle lived at Bonavista where in due course of time Miss Pottle died. Then her husband came to live at Portugal Cove where he died and is buried. He resided with his daughter Mrs. Goff—whose husband Mr. George Goff—was an Englishman by birth—and from 1820 to the time of his death in 1835, he kept a large Inn and carried on a supplying business at Portugal Cove. "Goff's Inn" was a well known hostel. Sir Thomas Cochrane was a frequent visitor thereat, riding across country on horseback to the Cove from his cottage at "Virginia." It is said that the high estimation in which the Governor held Mr. Goff was one reason why Sir Thomas made

the road from St. John's to Portugal Cove. This was the first main line of road ever made in Newfoundland. It was commenced in 1827 and completed, so as to be fit for vehicular traffic, in 1832. "Pretty Pheeny Goff,"—about whom I wrote in the 1905 Xmas Number of the QUARTERLY,—was a daughter of Mr. George Goff. A sister of Mrs. Goff's and therefore another daughter of Captain and Mrs. Pottle was married to Mr. William King, Planter of Portugal Cove.

Mrs. Pottle, nee Miss Jennings—has many descendants living in Newfoundland; some of these, about sixty years ago, made an effort to obtain some of the property left behind him by John Jennings the miser. They failed because they could produce no legal evidence of the marriage of Captain and Mrs. Pottle. The claim as far as Miss Jennings (the Mrs. Pottle in question) was concerned was recognised, and had she been living she certainly would have had the money. John Jennings shortly before his death went to a lawyer and had his Will duly made, but having forgotten his spectacles he did not then and there sign it—saying that he would do that after he reached home. This must have escaped his memory. He was then over a hundred years old. After his death this Will was found in his coat pocket, but as it was not signed by the testator it was valueless.

Some of the Jennings descendants think that Mr. and Mrs. Pottle were married at Bonavista. If so, the record has perished. In 1761 when they are said to have arrived at Bonavista that place had no resident clergyman and the Church Register contains no record of such marriage, although it is the oldest in Newfoundland—dating back to 1747.

No one in Newfoundland, apart from the couple immediately interested, appears ever to have known where, when, or by whom Captain and Mrs. Pottle were married. My own impressions is that, as this was a runaway match, the couple were probably married by a "Fleet Chaplain" in the Debtors Prison which then stood on Fleet Street, London. A "Fleet Chaplain" was a clergyman confined for debt in the Fleet Prison. In those days if you got into debt, either by your fault or your misfortune, you were sent to jail until the debt was paid. Frequently the debt was never paid, and the debtor died in jail. They knew nothing about "Insolvency Acts" and "whitewashing" in the "good old times." If we had to live in those times we should find them hard indeed and pray fervently to get back to present day conditions. In "the good old times" they had a fine assistant in killing off prisoners in a malignant kind of typhus known as jail fever: that without respect of place or persons visited every prison in Britain.

But to return to my subject. In 1755 "Fleet Marriages" had become such a public evil that they were abolished by Act of Parliament. Nevertheless as they had been in existence, and legal too, for very many years, a large section of the public held by them. A custom, though evil, dies hard. In 1769 a "Fleet Chaplain" was transported to Botany Bay for twenty years for having, after the Act was passed and in defiance of the law, married no less than fifteen hundred couples. Possibly Captain Pottle and Miss Jennings were married by this very man.

The first Duke and Dutchess of Marlborough had but one son, and his death took place many years before that of his parents. Yet, it is somewhat singular, that during the past twenty-six years I have seen two young ladies, members of the Churchill families residing at Portugal Cove, either of whom might have sat for a portrait of the great Sarah herself. They were each of them the exact image of an engraving that I have seen of a picture of the great Dutchess (Sarah Jennings)—painted by Sir Godfrey Kneller. Sir Godfrey Kneller's fame as a skilled painter of Royal portraits is celebrated by the poet Addison; with the first verse of whose "Ode to Sir Godfrey" I conclude this article.

"Thou Kneller, long with noble pride,  
The foremost of thy art, hast vied,  
With nature in a generous strife,  
And touched the canvass into life."

31

Jennings Name file

J. D.  
Copy & Lang letter  
for Pennis.  
Sept 27. 9. 6.

A.  
1

Newfoundland  
No. 65

Downing Street,  
14 September 1906.

Sir,

I have the honour to transmit to you for the consideration

of your Ministers, the papers noted in the subjoined schedule

I have the honour to be,

Sir,

Your most obedient, humble Servant,

ELGIN.

The Officer Administering

the Government of

Newfoundland :

Date.	From	To	Subject.
1906			
June	Mr D. J. Jennings	Colonial Office	} Bill of the late Mr D. Jennings.
2nd July	Colonial Office	Mr D. J. Jennings	
3rd September	Mr D. J. Jennings	Colonial Office	

Copy.

No. 23021/1906.

Downing Street,

2nd July, 1906.

Sir,

I am directed by the Earl of Elgin to acknowledge the receipt (on the 26th *ultimo*) of your letter regarding the will of the late Mr. D. Jennings and to suggest that you or your solicitors should communicate direct with the Colonial Secretary, St. John's, Newfoundland on the subject.

2. The papers enclosed in your letter are returned herewith.

I am, &c.,

(Sd) H. Bertram Cox.

Copy.

24 Nelson Road,  
Landport,  
Portsmouth,

September 3 1906.

Dear Sir,

I forwarded the copy of the will what I sent you and the letter and also your letter and forwarded it on to St. John's, Newfoundland, as per your instructions which was about three months ago and have not had any answers from same. What do you advise me to do in the matter. I had it addressed to 63 Bishop St, but I have moved from that address but they say they have not had any letters for me. Awaiting your reply.

I am, &c.,

(Sd) Dan John Jennings

Full.

Sir,

The Address I had it directed <sup>to</sup> was  
63, Bishop St.

Landport, Portsmouth,  
Hants.

Copy.

Sir,

The copy of his will I have in my possession has three Newfoundland stamps on it. My sister Mrs Porter living at Widley Road, Portsmouth, told me she had a will and it was very old almost fallen to pieces it is my uncle's will.

I shall be glad if you will kindly assist me in the matter.

From yours obediently,

(Sgd) DAN JOHN JENNINGS

Full.

63 Bishop Street,

Fratton,

Portsmouth.

Sir,

I have to state that a Mr. Comben, Fernlea, Campbell Road, Southsea, is detaining a receipt of mine what I had from Messrs Monies Williams and Robinson, 6-7 Great Tower Street, my Lawyers, London.

Copy.

In the name of God Amen.

I now make my last will and testament.

From the date as testified I fully bequeath all my present possessions, viz. all my landed property here at Agaforte and in St. John's Newfoundland to my four nieces and nephews, viz. first Mr. Henry Dan Winsor on one part, Mrs. Ann Winsor Junior, Mrs. Sarah Ann Butler, Mrs Emma Butler, Mrs Hammah Winsor Full. This latter niece now residing in Portsmouth to be reserved during my sister's natural life. All and everything in the shape of money property to be enjoyed by her and thence to be appropriated as above. N.B. My funeral expenses to be borne by the proceeds of my private property now at Agaforte. With these plain remarks of my private signature I do hope it may be fairly contributed.

Given under my hand at Agaforte in the Island of St. John's Newfoundland this first day of November Anno Domino 1870.

Dan Jennings. Witness Anna Jennings Winsor, Clara Isabel Winsor.