

MEMOIRS OF A BUSY LIFE: BY JAMES RYDER RANDALL

Being Stray Reminiscences Of The Author Of
"Maryland, My Maryland."

THE CHRONICLE OF AN EVENTFUL LIFE

This is the first of a series of reminiscent articles by James R. Randall, author of "Maryland, My Maryland." Mr. Randall was born in Baltimore in 1839, but has lived in the South for many years. He is now editing a weekly paper in New Orleans.

BY JAMES R. RANDALL.

I learned how to read when I was three years old. My first teacher was a Miss Ann Bready, and as I precociously took such interest as I could in the news of the world, I am one of THE SUN'S earliest perusers, if not subscribers, and my love and admiration for the paper have continued from my infancy or earliest boyhood in Baltimore to the present hour, growing with my growth and increasing with my strength of body and mind.

The evening paper in Baltimore in those days was the Patriot, I think, and as my father, then located on Smith's wharf, as a merchant and owner of vessels, engaged chiefly in the South American trade, he received it at his office and brought it home in the evening. I used to sit patiently on the doorsteps awaiting his arrival and eagerly anticipating the pleasure of becoming posted about the happenings of the day. So my drift toward journalism and literature became manifest from a very early day.

As a little lad, I was sent to Professor Clark, years before the teacher of the juvenile Edgar Allan Poe. He was a worthy graduate of the Jesuits—a Georgetown College alumnus—and a learned pedagogue of the old school. He revered the Solomonian proverb that "if you spare the rod you spoil the child," and his formidable rattan cane was the instrument of imparting discipline. Several times I had to hold out my hand for chastigation, when, as I was a fat, chubby boy, another part of my body would have been personally preferred.

AT OLD GEORGETOWN.

Once at Georgetown College I was also castigated on my hand for having been decoyed out of bounds to Washington city. The instrument used was a cat-o-nine-tails with bullets on the thongs, administered by Rev. Bernard A. Maguire, who became president of the College, and a very eloquent preacher. Reminiscences of him I have elsewhere produced; but his chastisement remains in my memory more strikingly than even Frank Ward's inimitable vocal rehearsal of his peculiar manner and language. The boys who persuaded me to break the rules were Edward and Charles Nathan Morse, sons of the then Congressman from Louisiana, both of whom have been long dead.

Incidentally, I may mention that in my prime of life I visited Professor Clark, at Washington. He was then beyond his ninetyeth anniversary. He appeared to be remarkably well preserved physically, but his mind dwelt more in the remote past than in the present. He remembered the illustrious men and women of antiquity, especially those connected with his classic Latin and Greek textbooks. He had not forgotten Pole, but this genius was about the only one of his pupils he had any recollection of. Though dwelling at Washington during the war between the States, he was oblivious to it and had never heard of either Lee or Grant! However, Alexander the Great, Pompey, Cæsar, the mother of the Gracchi—these were living entities in his venerable brain, but it was a blank about modern heroes and heroines.

THE POE MONUMENT.

As somewhat pertinent, since I have recalled Edgar Allan Poe and one of his first teachers, I may state that, according to the late J. C. Derby, in his personal memoirs, it was a letter of mine that started initially the Poe monument. I had, as editor of the Augusta (Ga.) Chronicle and as its Washington correspondent, when on a visit to my Baltimore family, made a pilgrimage to the poet's then neglected grave in the Westminster Churchyard, and immediately afterward wrote a letter to the Augusta paper on the subject. Mr. Derby states that when he read that letter he at once clipped it out and sent it to Mr. George W. Childs in Philadelphia, urging him to take a substantial interest in having a monument erected over that hallowed spot containing the relics of the marvelously gifted but unhappy bard.

Years afterward I was one of the party who, on the sand hills of Augusta, disinterred the remains of Richard Henry Wilde, author of "My Life Is Like the Summer Rose" and some less popular, if more artistic, poems. He had died of yellow fever at New Orleans and his body was sent to some Georgia relatives, who buried it in their garden. His skeleton had shrunk in the collapsed metal coffin, inclosed in a wooden box which had entirely decayed.

There were rents in the metal vesture and we observed that the yellow morocco slippers placed on his feet in death remained intact. He had been laid in Georgia soil with his head to the west instead of the east, and I wrote with a lead pencil on the new wooden receptacle directions that indicated the extremities, so that the traditional custom might be observed when we permanently deposited his corpse in our city cemetery. There is a modest monument to his memory in one of the noble and beautiful avenues of Augusta.

A POET'S GRAVEYARD.

The more romantic but practical men and women of that city purchased a large lot in the graveyard, which was designed to be a kind of "Poets' Corner," and when Paul H. Hayne died he was deposited alongside of Wilde. It was hinted to me that there too, some day, I was to be planted, but I gave \$100 for a lot of my own and will ultimately, I presume, sleep with my children gone before.

Perhaps I inherited some of my father's independence. He used to say humorously that at the deluge Noah, seeing his primal ancestor rowing a skiff, invited him to take shelter in the Ark; but the proffer was declined. So I have had the honor of helping give proper graves and monuments to two poets, indifferent to what might happen to myself out of the regular order.

When I was 10 years old Rev. James Ryder, S. J., a renowned orator and scholar in his day, who was my godfather and for whom I am named, persuaded my father to enter me at Georgetown College, of which he was president. My parents seemed imbued with the idea that I was a remarkable youth and that my education should be pushed undauntedly from the start. Never have I ceased regretting how that purpose, however well intended, was precipitated, for it injured my bodily health and caused me many years of affliction; but as it terminated happily, perhaps the evolution of my intellect and character was determined for the best.

Twice at college I had almost fatal cases of pneumonia, which left me very delicate and compelled me to leave when in the graduating class; and at the beginning of what some people call the Civil War I was discharged from the Crescent Regiment of Louisiana Volunteers as totally unfit for the duty of a soldier, having had 11 hemorrhages of the lungs. Before that time Dr. Grafton Tyler told me to guard my lungs constantly, and Dr. Riggin Buckler said:

"When you reach the grand climacteric of life you will either die soon or live long."

HEALTH AND LONG LIFE.

How I happened when the crisis came, in the providence of God, to turn to longevity I may mention in some future communication, merely relating now that one young lady was persuaded not to marry me by a strenuous elder sister on the ground that she would soon be widowed. She wedded, instead, a robust and powerful man. She and her husband have been dead for 20 years, and I am still in the procession, with phenomenal health, rejuvenated, as it were, with the spirit of fortitude and cheerfulness seldom found in the old.

Judge Taney was threatened with early death as Senator Whyte reminds me. The judge used to quote, as apposite to his case, that "it was the lean dog for the long chase," and though I am not by any means lean the long race is apparently

ahead of me, as if to illustrate the proverb with an exception.

In Dr. Bagby's brochure called "John M. Daniel's Latch Key," there is a notable exemplification of the utility of such prognostics as to the length or brevity of existence. Daniel, a proud and exceedingly brilliant and gifted man, with a sinewy physique denoting high vitality, in some freakish mood, gave Dr. Bagby a duplicate latch key and bade him enter his private premises at will, especially at night, to chat with him.

One evening the two foregathered. Daniel reclined on his sofa and Bagby sat in a chair beside him. They conversed for some time, Daniel absorbing most of the conversational time. At last he said:

"I have comparative wealth and am in vigorous health. I am in the glory of my years. After the war I will purchase a country seat and teach these Virginians how a gentleman should live. Bagby, I will eat the goose that eats the grass upon your grave."

At that period, as I remember, Dr. Bagby was in middle life, a chronic dyspeptic and with little promise of living much longer. Yet in about a year Daniel was dead and Bagby survived him many years afterward.

FROM PROSE TO POETRY.

In another communication I will recall how I gravitated to poetry, though fond of prose writing, and reproduce the first poem of mine that ever saw the light in a paper of the first rank. It will be a curiosity, if nothing else, since the editor of THE SUN seems to think that the readers of the paper would be interested in my reminiscences. How this is I do not pretend to say, although my casual experience is that unless one keeps himself some way before the public he is soon forgotten and, by the younger generation, ignored or regarded as an impertinent intruder upon the domain of youth, which has little compassion for those who bravely in old age seek to hold their own in the arena of the human amphitheatre.

JAMES R. RANDALL.