

# MEMOIRS OF A BUSY LIFE: BY JAMES RYDER RANDALL

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

### THE AUTHOR OF "MARYLAND, MY-MARYLAND"

This is the fourth of a series of six reminiscent articles by James R. Randall, author of "Maryland, My Maryland."

The New Orleans that I was about to leave in 1859 was quite different in some notable respects from the New Orleans of today.

Slavery existed then, and, while there were some cruel masters and mistresses, as well as brutal overseers, my experience is that the vast majority of white men and women were exceedingly kind to the black, brown and yellow chattels; and if there was miscegenation then, especially in regions where descendants of the Latin race prevailed, it is infinitely worse now, because of some unspeakable consequences that did not prevail in the former epoch.

That the slaves were as a rule well treated and well protected in health and morality there can be no doubt, for no subject people ever exhibited such love and fidelity as they did when most of the adult males were absent in the armies, and every female was safe from outrage or insult.

The "good negroes" today, who are tenderly cherished by the white population, are the old daddies and mummies who survive. The worst negroes are the educated, the unrestrained and conceited. Before the war the negroes had less mortality than the whites by 50 per cent.

Since the close of hostilities they are dying off twice as fast. The New England theory practiced in reconstruction and halted by what is called the second and successful revolt of the South will ultimately extinguish them. It will take a long time, a very long time, but it will gradually be accomplished. Will the historians of some far future time record that the so-called war for the Union ended in imperialism and the strife for negro freedom concluded with negro extinction?

In the old days there was comparatively little of what is now the new city. The French part of the town was dominant. Rich and aristocratic Creoles, merchants and planters had their stately mansions there; now they are mostly boarding houses.

Esplanade avenue was the grand residence section. It still retains some of its former splendor, but the magnificent St. Charles avenue, in the "American" part of the city, is now the incomparable section. The French and Spanish seemed to prefer narrow streets. The "Americans" loved space and wideness.

The French part of the municipality will always be a picturesque entity, for the St. Louis Cathedral is there and the Opera House; but the chances are that it will largely become the abode of negroes and various foreign nationalities, who are apt to drive the prosperous natives across Canal street into the more modern city.

### THE OLD AND THE NEW.

The New Orleans of a former time rejoiced in street cars drawn by horse or mule power, and the lines were not many or lengthy. Now, one of the most remarkable spectacles in this country is the concentration of the electric railways on Canal street, which go in all directions and aggregate hundreds of miles of extension.

In the old days it was a rare thing to see a young woman, worker of what is called the better class. Now there is a vast army, about 20,000, of all ages, which parade the streets, going or coming to their occupations, bareheaded, thin shirt-waisted in summer and often with a kind of masculine stride.

In the old days the men of the family supported the women, who became domestic in their skill and virtues. Today many of the women are either taking more or less care of the men or occupying their places.

In the old days the majority of the dry goods trade was in the hands of Christians. Today I understand that, with one notable exception, our Hebrew brethren monopolize the business.

The greatest establishment is controlled entirely by one Jewish family, whose immediate ancestor traveled along the levees with a pack on his back. One night he solicited shelter from a Creole sugar planter and it was denied. In the course of time the peddler owned that plantation and several others. In his will he enjoined on his children that no honest wayfarer should ever be turned from their doors or premises.

In the old days real statesmen were bred. I cannot frankly say the same thing is true today. From what I see of the young men of this time and their habits it may be declared emphatically that from their ranks could never be recruited soldiery such as followed the banners of Lee, Jackson or Forrest.

So I conclude that, while the material civilization of today far surpasses that of the epoch before the war between the States, the natives, North and South, have degenerated morally and spiritually, if not physically. From the way race suicide prevails and the way this country is inundated by foreigners the prospect seems to be that in the twenty-first century Europe will have reconquered the United States.

But enough! I did not intend when I started to be led into such a protracted disquisition. I meant to portray sketchily and briefly the New Orleans of 1859 and that of 1907.

### EN ROUTE TO POINTE COUPEE.

As I had agreed to go to the parish of Pointe Coupee, about 120 miles above the Crescent City, I had to get there by water transportation. It was the day of steamboats, as this is the day of railroads, with intimations of coming aerial navigation.

I took passage on the steamer Lafourche, and one recollection is that Hon. Duncan F. Kinner, on his way to his plantation, played poker with the captain nearly all night in the cabin saloon. Next day I arrived at my destination and landed.

The college to which I had been assigned as a professor was located on the False river, some three miles from the great river. The Mississippi in some more or less remote age had once coursed there, but cut another channel, leaving behind a large and clear lake, full of fish.

On the opposite shore from the college was a settlement of Acadians—the people of "Evangeline"—who preserved many of the customs of their Breton ancestry and were a most industrious, pious and worthy flock. They were peaceful and contented, but when the war became flagrant they

went forth gallantly, and some of them became very distinguished.

The college was a brick building of some respectable dimensions and had an endowment from one of the Poydras family who built it and gave it to the parish for educational purposes. It was an academy. The principal was M. Basil, who had once been a member of the Christian Brotherhood, but left it for the life of a teacher in the world.

At this time he was about 40 years old and married to a lady of the Lantry family, allied with the Provostys, prosperous and prominent then as some of its members are today. The head of the Provosty family was a noted lawyer and judge. His son, Oliver, is at present one of the Associate Justices of the Supreme Court in this State. He was, when a little boy, not more than 8 years old, one of my pupils, and I have probably spanked him once or twice.

I was hardly 21 years old and joined in the boyish sports like one of the scholars. But when I was alone, especially at night, my imagination occasionally blossomed into poetry. There came a time quickly when political frenzy, following the John Brown raid and the culprit's execution, burst into war preparations. I was very much interested and excited.

One day I rode to the river postoffice and read with intense emotion in the Delta newspaper how the Massachusetts regiment marching through Baltimore had been assailed by indignant and Southern-sympathizing citizens. I rode home to the college. Mr. Brander Matthews has narrated the sequel so graphically and truthfully that I may as well quote what he says on this subject:

### A MIDNIGHT INSPIRATION.

"'Maryland, My Maryland,'" begins Mr. Matthews, "was written by Mr. James R. Randall, a native of Baltimore. The poet was a professor of English literature and classics in Poydras College, at Pointe Coupee, on the Fausse riviere, in Louisiana, about three miles from the Mississippi. In April, 1861, he read in the New Orleans Delta news of the attack on the Massachusetts troops as they passed through Baltimore.

"This account greatly excited me," Mr. Randall wrote, in answer to my request for information. "I had long been absent from my native city, and the startling event there influenced my mind. That night I could not dismiss from my mind what I had read in the paper. About midnight I arose, lit a candle and went to my desk. Some powerful spirit seemed to possess me, and almost involuntarily I proceeded to write the song of 'My Maryland.'"

"I remember that this idea appeared first to take shape as music in the brain—some wild air that I cannot now recall. The whole poem was dashed off rapidly when once begun. It was not composed in cold blood, but under what may be called a 'conflagration of the senses, if not an inspiration of the intellect. No one was more surprised than I was at the widespread and instantaneous popularity of the lyric I had been so strangely stimulated to write."

"Mr. Randall read the poem the next morning to the college boys and at their suggestion sent it to the Delta, in which it was first printed and from which it was copied into nearly every Southern journal.

"Published in the last days of April, 1861, when every eye was fixed on the border States, the stirring stanzas appeared in the very nick of time. It was Mr. Randall's good fortune to be the instrument through which the South spoke. By a natural reaction his lines helped to fire the Southern heart. To do their work well his lines needed to be wedded to music. It was left for a lady of Baltimore, Miss Hetty Cary, later the wife of Prof. H. Newell Martin, to lend the lyric the musical wings it needed to enable it to reach every campfire of the Southern armies.

### SETTING IT TO MUSIC.

"The house of Mrs. Martin's father was the headquarters for the Southern sympathizers of Baltimore. Correspondence, money, clothing and supplies of all kinds went thence through the lines to the young men of the city who had joined the Confederate Army.

"Mrs. Martin tells how the enthusiasm of the girls who worked and the boys who watched for their chance to slip through the lines to Dixieland found vent and inspiration in such patriotic songs as could be made or adapted to their needs. The glee club was to hold its meeting in our parlors one evening early in June, and my sister, Miss Jenny Cary, had charge of the program on that occasion.

"With a schoolgirl's eagerness to score a success she resolved to secure some new ardent expression of feelings that by this time were wrought up to the point of explosion. In vain she searched through her stock of songs and airs; nothing seemed intense enough to suit her. Aroused by her tone of despair, I came to the rescue with the suggestion that she should adopt the words of 'Maryland, My Maryland.' I produced the paper and began declaiming the verses. 'Lauriger Horatius!' she exclaimed, and in a flash the immortal song found voice in the stirring air so perfectly adapted to it.

"That night when her contralto voice rang out the stanzas the refrain rolled forth from every throat present without pause or preparation, and the enthusiasm communicated itself with such effect to a crowd assembled beneath our open windows as to endanger seriously the liberties of the party."

"A few weeks later, shortly after the battle of Manassas, when Mr. and Mrs. Martin and her sister were guests of General Beauregard at his headquarters, they were serenaded by the famous Washington Artillery of New Orleans, aided by all the fine volleys within reach. After expressing their thanks they asked if there was any service they might render in return.

"Let us hear a woman's voice," was the cry which arose in response.

"And, standing in the tent door, under cover of the darkness, Miss Jenny Cary sang 'My Maryland.' The refrain was speedily caught up and tossed back from hundreds of rebel throats. This, I believe, was the birth of the song in the army. As the last notes died away there surged forth from the gathered throng a wild shout: 'We will break her chains! She shall be free! Three cheers and a tiger for Mary-

land!' And they were given with a will. There was not a dry eye in the tent, and next day not a cap with a rim on it in camp.

"In a few weeks 'My Maryland' had found its way to the hearts of the Southern people and became a great national song."

### THE ORIGINAL VERSION.

Here are the words of the song as they were originally written:

The despot's heel is on thy shore,  
Maryland!  
His torch is at thy temple door,  
Maryland!  
Avenge the patriotic gore  
That flecked the streets of Baltimore,  
And be the battle queen of yore,  
Maryland! My Maryland!

Hark to an exiled son's appeal,  
Maryland!  
My mother State, to thee I kneel,  
Maryland!  
For life and death, for woe and weal,  
Thy peerless chivalry reveal,  
And gird thy beautiful limbs with steel,  
Maryland! My Maryland!

Come! 'tis the red dawn of the day,  
Maryland!  
Come, with thy panoplied array,  
Maryland!  
With Ringgold's spirit for the fray,  
With Watson's blood at Monterey,  
With fearless Lowe and dashing May,  
Maryland! My Maryland!

Thou wilt not cower in the dust,  
Maryland!  
Thy beaming sword shall never rust,  
Maryland!  
Remember Carroll's sacred trust;  
Remember Howard's warlike thrust,  
And all thy slumb'ers with the just,  
Maryland! My-Maryland!

Dear mother, burst the tyrant chain,  
Maryland!  
Virginia should not call in vain,  
Maryland!  
She meets her sisters on the plain—  
"Sic Semper!" 'tis the proud refrain  
That baffles minions back again,  
Maryland!

Arise, in majesty again,  
Maryland! My Maryland!  
Come! for thy shield is bright and strong,  
Maryland!  
Come! for thy dalliance does thee wrong,  
Maryland!  
Come to thine own heroic throng,  
Stalking with Liberty along,  
And give a new Key to thy song,  
Maryland! My Maryland!

I see the blush upon thy cheek,  
Maryland!  
For thou wast ever bravely meek,  
Maryland!  
But lo! there surges forth a shriek,  
From hill to hill, from creek to creek,  
Potomac calls to Chesapeake,  
Maryland! My Maryland!

Thou wilt not yield the Vandal toll,  
Maryland!  
Thou wilt not crook to his control,  
Maryland!  
Better the fire upon thee roll,  
Better the shot, the blade, the bowl,  
Than crucifixion of the soul,  
Maryland! My Maryland!

I hear the distant thunder-hum,  
Maryland!  
The Old Line bugle, fife and drum,  
Maryland!  
She is not dead nor deaf nor dumb—  
Huzza! She spurns the Northern scum!  
She breathes! She burns! She'll come! She'll come!  
Maryland! My Maryland!

The poem is reproduced practically almost verbatim as I first wrote it. As years progressed after the war I was tempted to change one line, not in substance, but form; but the scholarly Father Barland, of Spring Hill College, near Mobile, Ala., wrote to me: "At first I thought your changed line an artistic improvement, but after mature reflection I now feel sure that you should let the poem remain in the original form, and I like it best that way."

I have done so in this version, despite the criticism of Dr. O. W. Holmes.

### DIFFERENCES OF OPINION.

Some people North and South differ about the primacy of my poetry. Several Northern priests of learning and literary culture think that "John Pelham" is the best, some prefer "At Fort Pillow;" I think myself that "At Arlington" in its entirety and not ravished of the concluding stanza, is the most artistic. Senator Whyte may choose "Resurgam." I might say that the conditions are so different that an equitable judgment is not attainable.

The late William T. Walters used to tell the story of an Irishman who gauged the material excellence of a man by success. "My Maryland" may have to stand alone as the most successful, and to the multitude, therefore, the best poem.

I have been suggestively asked to write another version adapted to the present time, but I cannot do it. It would be a species of literary suicide and I can no more reduplicate it successfully than I could be born again in the flesh.

JAMES R. RANDALL.