

MEMOIRS OF A BUSY LIFE: BY JAMES RYDER RANDALL

Being Vagrant Reminiscences Of The Author of "Maryland, My Maryland."

THE AUTHOR OF "MARYLAND, MY MARYLAND"

This is the concluding paper of Mr. James R. Randall's reminiscences. His account of the circumstances under which "Maryland, My Maryland," was written was published last Sunday.

V.

After I had written "My Maryland," still a youthful professor at Poydras College, the matrons of the parish took up my case socially and agreed that I must, as they expressed it in French (for it was essentially a Creole parish, where the French language was almost universally used), "take root there;" that is, to be married to one of the dulcet damsels of the place.

It was, as it were, decided that a certain lovely and very devout girl exactly suited me. She was a beautiful blonde, and as her father had been twice widowed she was the lady of the household and the mother, by proxy, of the infant children of the second marriage. She was astute and faithful to that mission, as to all others, and it would be hard to find the world over such a noble and exalted character. But she was a predestined "Bride of Heaven," and when the war ended, with its desolation, she entered a visitation convent.

Returning to New Orleans, her brother asked me to visit her in her novitiate. He was very much averse to her vocation and entreated her, while she was allowed to do so, to come back into the world she had abandoned. Moved by his importunities and insistence, she turned her tearful eyes to me and said: "What shall I do?" I instantly replied: "Remain as you are, for you have chosen the better life which shall not be taken away."

From that time she would listen to no appeal to change her vocation and became an angel of mercy until the good Lord summoned her to Himself and she died in holiness and beauty—

Like a star, lost on the brow of day.

I have no doubt that in the realm of bliss inexpressible she has for long years—long to us—been praying for those she cherished, and well will it be for those of us who remained to fight outside if we can eventually attain to the supreme bliss that she enjoys.

RETURN TO NEW ORLEANS.

I presently became dissatisfied with the monotony of rural life and embraced the first opportunity to return to New Orleans and mingle with the more active existence of the metropolis, for war was imminent and the whole South was inflamed, as the North was, with the coming storm.

In an interval of preparation Mr. George C. Jenkins, of Baltimore, a kinsman through my mother and her sister by marriage, wrote to me and said: "Can you not give us something as a kind of companion to 'My Maryland'?" So I dashed off a poem called "There's Life in the Old Land Yet," and so George Jenkins became, so to speak, the foster-father of that lyric.

At that time, too, I used to visit the home of an opulent Jewish family and presently, having seen the charming daughter of the household, Eva, picking lint for the soldiers, I wrote "The Cameo Bracelet," which is considered an artistic production and reproduced in a number of collections. Many years after this Eva, then a mother and grandmother, sent me a note, as I was in New Orleans, running about as follows:

"It is unthinkable that you should be here and not come to see us."

An invitation to dinner *en famille* followed. The girl of 17 had become a mature matron. She had married a rich gentleman of her own people, living in splendor on the fashionable St. Charles avenue. She had numerous children of both sexes, and said:

"We are agnostics. We have separated from the synagogue. Our children have perfect liberty to marry whomsoever they please without regard to religion."

Indeed, one girl had wedded a Christian, but the union was not a fortunate one because the so-called Christian was a very bad one and a torment to his Hebrew relatives who had because of opulence and Herbert Spencer departed from their ancient faith.

The parents and grandparents of this intellectual lady were the most rigid and orthodox Jews, and originally came from Baltimore. I, being a rather pert youngster at the time, said to the grandfather:

"How is it you eat shellfish?"

He replied: "I have examined the matter. Moses in his hygienic laws properly forbade the eating, for example, of oysters, but the oysters of the Sea of Galilee were contaminated. Had he lived on the banks of the Chesapeake he never would have issued such an inhibition, and I take advantage of that fact."

Years afterward I learned that the oysters of the Chesapeake, because of the folly of man, had become equally suspicious until recently. Indeed, when in Baltimore, I fearlessly partook of raw bivalves while dining at a hotel with a brilliant young Jewish lawyer and a singular result followed.

AFTER EATING OYSTERS.

When I was homeward bound to Augusta, Ga., a curious excrescence formed on the back of my neck, which one doctor pronounced a ringworm and another expert a carbuncle. Of course, I blamed it upon the oysters of the Chesapeake, but by prompt application of a powerful antiseptic and having a constitution that seemed to resist ordinary poisoning, it was dissipated.

Soon after getting home Governor Whyte wrote to me, and among other things, said:

"Your friend S——, who dined with you, has got it in the neck." Less fortunate than I was—he had to go to a hospital and suffer a serious surgical operation.

I am glad to know that since then the laws of Maryland have been so arranged as to protect the purity of the oyster supply. In this connection I may add that though the New Orleans people boast of the excellence of their oysters, which are relatively fine, they cannot approach the flavor of the Maryland product.

Talking about this to my agnostic Jewish lady friend, she said: "From Baltimore to Boston, I never touch oysters, because they have become, by sewage, polluted and perilous; luckily for us in Louisiana our supply is absolutely free from danger."

In this connection, while I am in a hygienic, reminiscential mood, I may add that, just after the war, a neighbor of my family was a Jew of great intelligence and one of my special friends in the old days of New Orleans. He was almost inordinately fond of ham, the unclean, or what Edgar Poe in his "Tale of Jerusalem" called "the unutterable flesh."

I said to him: "You are an orthodox Jew. How do you reconcile it to your religious eating of forbidden meat?" He replied: "I eat ham from Sunday to Wednesday. The inhibition is only a hygienic law. We are considered 'unclean' for three days and the penalty is not to enter within the synagogue for that period. I can cleanse myself between Wednesday and Saturday."

The wife of this singularly interesting man was a Christian woman of Baltimore. She became a Jewess, but, I am told, since the death of her husband, has returned to her former faith. I observe that rich Jews, like many opulent Christians, hang loosely to their creeds, if they do not become merely perfunctory in their observances or openly incredulous.

FALL OF NEW ORLEANS.

But to resume my narrative. The war was actively opened and the young men flocked to the standards of Lee and the generals operating in the West.

Great efforts were made to protect New Orleans. But the fleet of Farragut, silencing the forts below the city, left it at his mercy. Before the war vessels arrived a frenzied mob rushed to the levee and set on fire millions of dollars worth of property, such as cotton bales and commercial vessels. The people at first refused to surrender, but suddenly yielded.

A file of United States marines marched to the City Hall and pulled down the State flag. The Confederate forces, a very small contingent, before Butler could arrive with his land army, left in a railway train for Yazoo City, and I accompanied them. Years afterward I met General Butler on a Bay Line steamer and mentioned that I did not await his arrival. He jocularly said: "Did you come back to town?"

"Not while you were there," I replied.

Butler had become a Democrat again and hated Grant, who accused him of having been "bottled up" at Bermuda Hundred by Beauregard. After supper Butler engaged in conver-

sation with several of Grant's Cabinet and I listened to him. He was very scathing in his attacks upon Grant, but praised General Lee and alluded to the Southern soldiers as Confederates and not as "rebels." I had been accustomed to his being called "beast," for his conduct at New Orleans, but this remarkable transformation rather mollified me.

Had General Whiting not kept his pledge to Beauregard of total abstinence, Butler and his whole army would have been captured. I asked Colonel Harris how it had happened, and he sentimentally replied: "Had Whiting drank two or three cocktails before the critical moment we would have bagged Butler and his whole force. He kept his word and lost his head."

Beauregard, to his dying day, ascribed the Confederate defeat to President Davis, and as he could not forgive him, though a Catholic, he died without the sacraments of his church and without its blessing. His biography by Roman explains it all and is a terrible indictment. I knew him well, but regret that he could not like Mr. Stephens' "reverse revenge."

At Fortress Monroe I stood alongside of General Miles when he went aboard the prison ship and marched Mr. Davis to his cell in the fortress. No doubt the indignities Mr. Davis endured in the fortress helped soften some criticisms that would otherwise have been visited upon him when the war had ended.

YOUTH AND AGE.

After a lapse of 45 years I happened to be in Louisiana and paid a visit to Pointe Coupee, where as a young man of 22 I had written, "My Maryland!"

It was not exactly in the manner of Rip Van Winkle, for I am still a vigorous man. I had a room in the hotel of what is now a thriving town. My room overlooked the lake, and for a long time I sat by the window gazing on it, reviving the scenes and memories of long ago.

Next morning, Sunday, I went to the old church to mass. I cannot adequately repeat on paper how much I was affected when kneeling at the same place where I knelt so often in my youth. I tried to avoid all distractions, but, ever and anon, the people, young and old, whom I had known familiarly before the Civil War, rose up before my vision, most of them in eternity, many handsome or beautiful and charming then; now surviving as grandparents, and some with heart wounds inflicted by the events of battle, never to be effaced while life remains.

The venerable church, built in 1827, was unchanged. It is the same wooden, white-washed, barnlike structure; the same stiff pews and much of the ancient equipment. In the dwarf cupola the same cross of metal exists, sadly bent and twisted by the tempests of recurring winters. But just alongside, close to good Father Baccloch's pastoral residence, a fine new church, built of stone, with artistic architecture, is almost ready for occupation and service.

I went to the site of the old college, which had been burned. The desk where I wrote "My Maryland" was saved and stored in a courthouse outbuilding, but subsequently burned. An adventurous Yankee brother came down there to buy it, offering a large sum of money, but it was in ashes.

It pleased me to know that my name was still traditionally kept in honorable remembrance, and the young and old still say, "though he sang of his dear Maryland, it was written in our parish and we claim that honor with his native State."

BLOSSOMING OF AN OLD TREE.

And now, after many years, Maryland people have asked me to return to my birthplace, if only for one day, to be their guest at the Jamestown Exposition on the 12th of September next.

It may be as the Roman gladiator said: "Being about to die, I salute you, Cæsar!" It may be, emulating my illustrious friend, Senator Whyte, there are still comparatively many useful years before me. Be that as it may, I shall when the final summons comes, like Colonel Newcome, answer, "Adsum," as I have endeavored to live my life with some credit and endeavored so to live it as to pass away with an unchanged mind and in the peace that passes all understanding.

The task set me by the editor of THE SUN is finished and I am prepared to close the chapter at Jamestown as the reputed last surviving of the Confederate poets, "acquainted with grief," but armed with fortitude and cheerfulness—

As some tall cliff, that lifts its awful form,
Swells from the vale and midway leaves the storm,
Though round its breast the rolling clouds are spread,
Eternal sunshine settles on its head.

JAMES R. RANDALL.