

# MEMOIRS OF A BUSY LIFE; BY JAMES RYDER RANDALL

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

## THE AUTHOR OF "MARYLAND, MY MARYLAND"

This is the third of a series of reminiscent articles by James R. Randall, author of "Maryland, My Maryland." In a subsequent article he will tell of the events which led up to the writing of his famous song.

The influence of good women, young and old, has always been very profound in forming my character and bringing forth the poetic faculty or inspiration.

First of all, incomparably, I mention my mother. She was, when I was a child, a singularly handsome lady, with classic beauty of features, brilliant, sparkling eyes, full of soulful intelligence. Her love for me was unspeakable and she ever filled me with a noble ambition and the loftiest ideals. She never wrote a line of poetry, to my knowledge, in her life, but she possessed the poetic nature in the highest degree. No one was prouder than that mother when her little boy blossomed into verse.

Many and terrible were the trials and afflictions of that devoted mother, but she bore them all firmly, though I could at times see how fiercely they assailed her spirit and her heart. As I grew old myself and knew what it was to be buffeted by the world, my appreciation of her was all the keener, and my chief regret is that I did not understand and cherish her as I might have done, for if I have any specially good qualities they are due to her, and I trust that some day in the eternal land she will be reunited to me forever.

### SOME EARLY LOVES.

Very early in boyhood I was attracted by fair faces of young girls in whom I saw perfection and who invoked my rhyming propensities.

The first one was, I think, a schoolgirl who was improving her French with a courtly madame on Franklin Square. She died early and my grief was sincere. Another schoolgirl fascinated me and to her much juvenile versification was addressed. She is now a comely matron in Baltimore and may still possess some of those adoring lispings of the Muse.

As I grew more manly there were other romantic attachments, which stirred my mind and strangely guided my destiny; but all of that period, quite unconsciously, there was a South Carolina maiden awaiting me whom I afterward married and who became the mother of my eight children, four of whom are in Heaven. Though this faithful wife, once so gentle and fair, is no longer young, like myself, all of her fine characteristics remain and because of the joys and sorrows we have shared bravely together she is doubly dear.

Returning to Baltimore from Brazil not improved in health, but perhaps injured by the tedious voyage, I was at a small salary given clerical work with Lucas Bros., then in the book and type-foundry business. One of the Lucas brothers had married a sister of my mother.

After that kind of employment for a few weeks there came to Baltimore a middle-aged gentleman, Mr. Cyprian T. Jenkins, who had long resided in Florida, holding some office under the Government at a place called Bayport, on the Gulf Coast, a poor hamlet which, I understand, has not improved at all with the remainder of the State. My fancy was inflamed by Mr. Jenkins' recital of the State, which was more or less barbaric. The Seminole War had not been wholly concluded and Osceola had not long died a prisoner at Charleston. So, my parents finding that my adventurous spirit would not be appeased consented to let me follow Mr. Jenkins, but not in his company, to Bayport. In some curious, psychologic way I felt that I was mysteriously being led to the accomplishment of a mission that was to distinguish me.

Arriving by boat on the St. John's river at Palatka, I found the mail wagon driven by a young Irishman named McGrath and took passage in it across the peninsula. There was no railway transportation at that time.

### A TRIP ACROSS FLORIDA.

The first night of the journey we halted at a planter's dwelling, a very rude one. The hunting dogs under the house were moaning dolefully and our host told us that wolves were near by and that they sometimes attacked the cattle in the pens.

On the second night we reached Bayport. There was a ball, rather rustic, progressing, and I saw some pretty girls in civilized finery. It struck me that my barbaric habitation was not so bad after all; but my heart sank within me when all of those merry damsels embarked next morning on a steamboat for Cedar Keys, where they belonged.

Major Parsons, who had made a fortune

in the Indian war as a quartermaster, had a handsome dwelling in the place, surrounded with oaks and semi-tropical foliage. He had married a niece of Commodore Decatur, but was childless. An old maiden lady, sister of Mrs. Parsons, dwelt with them and a brother, called Dr. Decatur, who attended the major's store. My cousin Cyprian had a comfortable cottage and his salary sufficed for his modest wants. When he toured his district and the Parson-Decatur family departed for the North, I was left alone with fishermen and their families, teaching school.

McGrath had married an old woman with some property and in his household was a kinsman, a youth named Clarence Stewart, who seemed to be of a race apart. He was handsome, valiant, talented, eager for knowledge and quick at acquiring it. He loved me ardently and I reciprocated this affection. He tried to imitate me in all things. His handwriting was identical with mine. When I would go into the solitude of the forest with him the remembrance of Baltimore and my devoted mother overcame me and I sat with him under a gigantic pine tree, seemingly hearing the Cathedral bell calling me back from the wilderness from which there appeared to be no escape. When Clarence Stewart saw my despondency he would in his cordial way endeavor to cheer me.

### A FOREST PHILOSOPHER.

One day he said: "You do not know how I feel for you, yet I bless the day you came into my poor life and brightened it. You will not stay here long and then I shall be doubly desolate. But I will never forget you, and I beg that you will always remember me."

Then, taking up two bits of wood, he said: "See how easily I can snap this piece. See how, with every effort, I cannot break this one. The first, you see, has a weak fiber. The second has a strong one. So, it seems to me, that is the difference between the weak and the stout heart in this world. Oh, do you resemble the stout-hearted pine and not the weak one! If so, you will not be broken in the conflict which all of us have to wage."

I never forgot that lesson of the little forest philosopher and I never forgot Clarence Stewart. I can in imagination see him as he once was and I will remember him lovingly to the last. The day came, as he predicted, that I would break my bonds and it came near breaking the tender, valiant heart of Clarence Stewart. We corresponded faithfully even during the war, when he was a Florida volunteer. The day that he ceased to write I knew that he was dead—slain in battle. O faithful soul, God grant that you are in the abode of the blessed!

My cousin determined to marry and off he went to Vermont to espouse a mature lady of that State, an excellent woman. She tried to make my lot more comfortable, but I felt instinctively that the hour had struck for my deliverance and I was inspired to bring it about.

There was in New Orleans a college mate of mine named John Laurans, a Creole of French descent, reared in the parish of Pointe Coupee, about 120 miles up the Mississippi river. He was one of the most intellectual of the young men who ever entered Georgetown College. He was easily first in all studies and somehow became very friendly to me. He had entered a law office and would have made, I am sure, a great advocate had his life been spared. Along with two brothers and two sisters the family were orphaned.

### OFF TO NEW ORLEANS.

I wrote to him to see Mr. Meeker, a shipbroker in the Crescent City, who had once been, at Charleston, S. C., agent for my father's vessels. Mr. Meeker at once bade me come on and he would give me a clerkship at \$50 a month. I immediately prepared to go away.

I hired a Dane named Peter Peterson, a dangerous character when drunk. He and his boys had foreheads like bulls and their mode of fighting was butting into the stomachs of their adversaries. Peter had the only craft capable of taking me to Cedar Keys, where I could embark on the steamer which came from Havana.

With this formidable individual our little vessel put to sea. There was no wind. All night we were becalmed off Bayport. I could see the lights twinkling in the village houses. Around us wailed the melancholy loons. As the night wore on Peterson quaffed deeply of the whisky in his

jug and became more and more uproarious. I thought of his riotous propensities, but fearlessly went to sleep, feeling that I would not be thwarted in my object and that some remarkable event was ahead for me.

When I awoke in the morning the boat was rapidly progressing under a stiff breeze, Peterson was like Lambro, "the mildest mannered man who ever scuttled ship or cut a throat." At sundown we reached the principal island of Cedar Keys, chiefly owned by Judge S—, at whose home I was elegantly entertained. The Judge had married late in life and had one child, a beautiful, fairylike damsel.

I was asked by the Judge before the sailing of the steamer to walk with him on the beach. He said: "I am a very old man. My greatest hope in life is to see my daughter marry some young man I respect." Putting his hand on my shoulder, he fervently added: "I have seen no young man whom I respected as I do you." All I had to do then was to return to the Judge's mansion and become his son-in-law and be eventually "monarch of all I surveyed." But I answered him kindly and, I think, in the words of the astrologer in "Guy Mannering":

I hear a voice you cannot hear,  
Which says I must not stay;  
I see a hand you cannot see,  
Which beckons me away.

So, I sailed away toward New Orleans and arrived there in due time, welcomed by John Laurans and overjoyed at my coming back to a great civilization. Little as I suspected it, I was beginning the journey to Pointe Coupee and to the events that produced "My Maryland."

JAMES R. RANDALL.