

liked to imagine stories, and his boyish head was filled with battles and sieges, with plumed knights and tournaments whom he placed in quite different situations from those presented by his great master, Walter Scott. After the war ended, times began to grow better, and when young Page was sixteen his father was able to send him to Washington and Lee University. During our conversation as to his college days I asked Mr. Page how he ranked as a student. He replied: "My standing was not high. I don't know that I had much ambition to be one of the first honor men. At any rate I got no medals of any kind. I suppose I was a fair average student, but I fear that I devoted myself more to outside reading than to my studies. I was a member of the literary society and for a time was the editor of the college paper. Contrary to the usual custom I wrote short articles instead of long essays, and from this got the nickname of the Short Article Editor. I wrote, I suppose, much for the pleasure of seeing myself in print."

"That must have been very good literary training," said I.

"I suppose it was," replied Mr. Page. "I did it more for the pleasure of writing than for anything else. I was very bashful in those days, and I know that I trembled when I first got up to speak in literary society. I had a chum at college who is now one of the most famous lawyers of the country. He excels as a debater. He was also bashful, and during our college days he joined with me in a method of improving our oratorical powers. We would get together in a room, and, having closed the doors, would debate with each other upon some question. One would stand on one side of the table and one on the other, and we would declaim away, each having a fifteen minutes' speech and a like time for answer. This practice helped me materially in my work as a lawyer. It enabled me to think upon my feet."

"What did you do after leaving school?" I asked.

"My first work was as a teacher. I was employed as the tutor of a private school in Kentucky not far from Louisville. I taught there for a year and enjoyed it very much. After that I went home, and later on went to law school at the University of Virginia."

"Did you do any writing while in Kentucky?"

"I tried to," replied Mr. Page, "but could get no one to publish what I wrote. The great paper of the region in which I lived was the Courier-Journal. I had a great ambition to see some of my articles in its columns. I was at this time much interested in Ik, Marvel's books, and I think I wrote some essays along that line. I wrote a story or so and sent them to the Courier-Journal. The editors did not publish the articles nor send back the manuscript. Later on, after some of my stories had been published in a Northern magazine, I happened to sit one evening next to Ballard Smith, then editor of the New York World, at dinner. He asked me some questions as to my first literary work, and I told him that a number of my first writings had been submitted to him when he was editor of the Courier-Journal, but that he had rejected them. Of course, he did not remember them, and it may be that they very deservedly went into the waste basket."

After leaving Kentucky Mr. Page went back to Virginia. He spent a short time at home and then decided to become a lawyer. He kept up his literary work while at the University of Virginia, writing articles for the college magazine. Some of the most interesting of his early attempts were made at his home in Virginia during his vacations. For a time it was his

custom to write stories for his friends on slates and to rub them out after reading them. As he told me this, I said:

"That must have been a great waste of good material. The stories you then rubbed out would be very valuable now."

"I don't know about that," replied Mr. Page, with a laugh. "There are many things which I have written since then and published which I wish could now be on the slate so that I could rub them out."

"When did you do your first work in dialect writing?"

"I suppose some of it was done in those slate stories," replied Mr. Page. I tried to write in dialect while I was at the University of Virginia and later on, after I began my practice of law in Richmond. It was when I was practicing there that I wrote a poem entitled 'Unc' Gabe's White Folks' and sent it to the old Scribner, which is now the Century. It was accepted and I received a check for \$15 for it. It was my first money for literary work, and I remember that I was very proud of the check. Later on I wrote an article on old Yorktown for the Scribner, and then sent them my first story, which was entitled 'Marse Chan.'

"Is there any story connected with the writing of 'Marse Chan,' Mr. Page?" I asked.

"Yes; the story started in my mind from an old letter which a friend of mine showed me. This letter was from an illiterate girl in Georgia to her soldier sweetheart. The letter was poorly written and poorly spelled, but full of pathos. The girl had, it seemed, trifled with the man, but after he had left for the war she had realized her great love for him and written. She wrote: 'I know I have treated you mean. I ain't never done right with you all my life and I loved you all the time. When you asked me to marry you, I laughed and said I wouldn't have you, and it makes me cry to think you are gone away to the war. Now, I want you to know I love you, and I want you to git a furlow and come home and I'll marry you.' With a few words of affection the letter closed, but a postscript below was added: 'Don't come without a furlow, for unless you come home honorable I won't marry you.' This letter was received by the soldier only a few days before the battle of Seven Pines, and after he was shot it was found in his breast pocket just over his heart. The pathos of it struck me so forcibly that out of it came the story, 'Marse Chan.'"

"When did you write 'Meh Lady?'" I asked.

"Not for some time after 'Marse Chan' was written," he replied. "The law, you know, is a very jealous mistress, and all of my energy was going in my practice. Such writing as I did in Richmond was done during the evening, and for a time I stopped writing entirely, for fear the work would interfere with my success at the bar. The story 'Marse Chan' was kept for several years by Scribner's before it was published. It had been paid for and I wrote the editor asking why they did not publish it. Shortly after that I received the proof, and the story appeared. I was married in 1886, and 'Meh Lady' was written a short time after that. I then wrote other stories and have been writing more or less from that time to this."

"You were speaking of law, Mr. Page. Were you very much of a lawyer?"

"That is a leading question," said the story writer, with a smile. "I think you ought to ask that of some of my co-practitioners in Richmond rather than me. I will only say that I was able to support myself within six months after I began my practice, and that for eighteen years, and, indeed,

up to the time I came to Washington to live, my chief income was from the law."

"How did you like your work as one of the editors of Harper's Magazine?"

"I was never one of the editors," replied Mr. Page. "I had an engagement with the Harpers to write a story every month for a year for the 'Editor's Drawer,' but I could not stand being obliged to furnish so much manuscript at a certain time. It worried me. I kept up the work, however, for two years and then stopped."

"Do you write rapidly?"

"Yes and no," was the reply. "Some times I can make my first draft very quickly. I write the first draft as rapidly as I can and then go over it very carefully in the revision. I try to simplify my writing as much as possible. The more simple it is I think the better it is. I find, however, that the revision often takes away the spirit from the first draft. I lay away the manuscript, and upon looking at it several weeks later I can see that the first draft is truer to nature than the more stilted revision. I think I do more careful work now than I have done in the past. My ideal is far above anything I have ever done, and I sometimes despair of approaching it. There is one thing I do, however, which I think is a good plan for any writer. That is I always give the best I have in me to the story which I am writing. I do not save anything which I think might perhaps be of use to me in the future. The cream, if you could use that expression, always goes to the present."

Speaking of Mr. Page calls attention to the enormous amount of literary work being done here. Almost as many great books are turned out at the national capital as at Boston or New York. John Russell Young, the librarian, has a new life of Grant well under way. He is being assisted in his work upon it by Fred Grant, and Colonel Fred told me not long ago that all the Grant papers had been put at Mr. Young's disposal. Mrs. General Grant has not yet decided as to the publication of her memoirs. She has them in manuscript and has put considerable work upon them during the past few years. She is not able to do much writing herself, but she can tell a story very well, and she has dictated her recollections to one of the best stenographers in the United States. Her book will be full of interesting details, and will give a great deal of unpublished history. I met Miss Eliza R. Skidmore here this week. She is one of the brightest and most entertaining travel writers of the times. She has spent the greater part of the past ten years in the far east, and has just published a book on Java, which is selling very well. Miss Skidmore is the author of 'Jinriksha Days in Japan', and also of 'Jinriksha Days in Japan' and also travels.

General Nelson A. Miles has just completed a series of articles on his recent trip to Europe for McClure's Magazine. These articles will describe the different armies in Europe and will be of great value from a military standpoint. They will be illustrated by photographs, some of which were taken by himself, and one of which shows him on the line of battle between the Turkish and Greek armies. General Miles's memoirs is still selling, and he has in prospect, I am told, a book for boys describing some of his more exciting Indian experiences.

Secretary Sherman made in the neighborhood of \$20,000 out of his book, although I understand that it has not paid the publishers as well as they expected. The two volumes were sold for \$7 in cloth, and the secretary received \$1 on each set sold. In addition to this, there was an edition de luxe which sold for \$25 per copy, each