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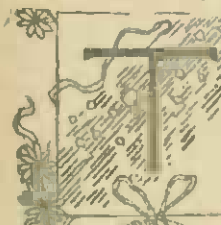
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FIRST GREAT NEWSPAPER INTERVIEW

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St Louis, June 17th, 1896.

HERE ARE now more than 400 newspaper men in St. Louis. During the convention they have telegraphed hundreds of thousands of words of interview matter, and through them nearly every leading Republican of the United States has been a special contributor to the press. At the same time, in his editorial sanctum here, the author of the newspaper interview has been writing his comments upon these opinions and perhaps at the same time reflecting upon the development of this great journalistic feature, of which he may be called the founder. I refer to J. B. McCullagh, now editor-in-chief of the Globe-Democrat but away back in the sixties the "Little Mac" who, as Washington correspondent, was the chief medium of communication between President Andrew Johnson and the public. Mr. McCullagh has long been noted as one of the brightest of our newspaper men. Born in Ireland, he began his life work as a printer in St. Louis, rising from the case to the reporter's desk. He was a mere boy at the outbreak of the war, but he at once went to the field as a correspondent, and before long was stationed at Washington, sending out news from that point. It was two years after the close of the war that he did his first great work as an interviewer. He was at the time correspondent of the Cincinnati Commercial, and as such he made a tour through the south writing up the condition of the different states. During this tour he surprised the press by a three-column talk with Alexander H. Stephens at his home in Georgia. It was the first interview of the kind ever given to the public, and the prominence of Mr. Stevens as ex-vice president of the confederacy and the striking ideas which Mr. McCullagh elicited from him created a decided sensation.

I had a long chat the other day with Mr. McCullagh about some of his early newspaper experiences. During it I asked him as to his first great interview. He replied: "I had, you know, good letters of introduction and these gave me a cordial reception. I met Alexander H. Stephens at his home in Georgia. He lived near Crawfordsville in an old-fashioned two-story frame house, which

he called Liberty Hall. There was a station near the house, and I supposed that I should find a tavern there where I could be accommodated during my stay. When I got off the train I found nothing but an old shanty kept by a negro woman. I asked her if she could tell me where Massa Alec lived. She showed me the house, and leaving my valise with her I walked up through the great lawn filled with forest trees and knocked at the door. A moment later I met Alexander Stephens and presented my letters. He insisted upon my coming at once to the house. I remained with him for three days and had several long talks with him. He discussed many matters relating to the south and gave some striking views as to emancipation and the negro. He told me that he would have emancipated his own slaves long ago, but that he did not know how they could have been taken care of. He said that his plantation would not raise enough money to support them, and that they had long cost him more than he was able to get out of them. They did not leave him at the close of the war and he had many of them still with him at the time of my visit."

"What other things did you talk of, Mr. McCullagh?" I asked.

"A great many," was the reply. "One of my questions, I remember, was as to what he considered the greatest of our state papers. His reply was:

"There are two of our state papers which I consider the greatest of all. One is Thomas Jefferson's second inaugural and the other is the second inaugural of Abraham Lincoln."

"This statement created a great comment throughout the south, and it was questioned by a number of the southern papers. The southerners could not then see how Alexander Stephens could mention Jefferson in the same breath with Lincoln. They looked upon Lincoln as an uneducated, illiterate man, and the passions of the war were still too hot for them to give him the credit that they now do. The comments concerning the statement were so many that when I met Mr. Stephens later on at Washington I told him that my report had been disputed and asked him if I had understood him correctly. He replied that he could not remember just what he had said to me, but that I had reported him exactly as he thought, and that as he really did believe that these papers were the greatest he could not see how I had gotten the idea if not from his conversation."

"How did you come, Mr. McCullagh, to have such close relations with President Johnson?"

"It came from a talk of his which I reported. He noted that the article I wrote expressed his views exactly, and

after that he gave me a number of interviews. The first conversation was given by President Johnson without any idea on his part that it would be published. When he had finished I asked him if he had any objections to my using what he had said in the newspapers. He replied that he had not, and when the matter was published he was so pleased with the result that I had easy access to the White House. I always prepared myself upon the subject which I wished the President to discuss before I went, and to a certain extent I had an idea of the answers which I thought he ought to make. His talks were entirely informal; many of them were more in the shape of chats than stilted interviews. We each had a rocking chair, and President Johnson would rock back and forth as he talked. He spoke very freely, saying whatever came uppermost in his mind, and at the close of each interview I would ask him if there was anything he had said which he did not wish reported. He would then tell me to run over the subjects we had discussed. I would do this, and if there was anything which he thought should not be published he would tell me. As a rule, however, he allowed me to use my own judgment."

"Andrew Johnson was not always discreet as to what he said," continued Mr. McCullagh. I remember one talk with him, during which I suggested that certain of his remarks, if published, would probably get him into trouble. These remarks related to Grant. Henry Wilson of Massachusetts, afterward vice-President, had suggested the name of General Grant for the presidency, and this notwithstanding there was a large temperance element in Massachusetts. Grant was to a certain extent to be the candidate of this element. Andrew Johnson referred to this, and thereupon compared Grant's habits as to drink with his own, much to the disparagement of Grant. He said, I remember, that General Grant could drink all the whisky he pleased and still be popular with the temperance people, whereas if he happened to look at a glass he was reported as having been in a state of beastly intoxication."

"Did Johnson drink much?" I asked.

"No; very seldom to excess," was the reply. "He was not averse to a glass of good whisky, but the stories of his bad habits in this respect have been greatly overdrawn."

"How about his being drunk at the time of his inauguration as vice president?"

"That story is true," replied Mr. McCullagh. "At least, it is a fact that he was intoxicated that day. The real story as to how he got drunk has never been told. I happened, in a curious