

Written for this Paper.

RICHARD MALCOLME JOHNSTON.

I spent an afternoon last week with one of the most charming writers of the United States. I refer to Richard Malcome Johnston, who ranks with Uncle Remus and Thomas Nelson Page as among the greatest story tellers of the South, and whose dialect tales of the Georgia hills have delighted the readers of the magazines for years. It was at his home on West North avenue in Baltimore, that I called upon him. His house is a three-story red brick, which is covered with vines and looks out upon one of the widest streets of the city. The living rooms of the family are on the second floor, and it was in the parlor, furnished with antique pieces, that I met Mr. Johnston. He is not so rich today as he was before the war, when he owned a plantation in the south and possessed the luxurious surroundings of a well-to-do planter of his time. He lives very comfortably, however, and his income from his writings is enough to support well himself and his family. It is not generally known to the public that Richard Malcome Johnston is one of the best educators of the United States. He was a professor in the University of Georgia at the time the war began, and when it closed, leaving himself and all his friends poor, he opened a boarding school for boys at his home, near Sparta, in Georgia, and made here for years \$20,000 and upward annually by teaching. He had about fifty boys, who paid him tuition fees of \$500 a year, and the most famous families of the South sent their children to him. Very few teachers in the United States today can make as much as \$20,000 a year, and the story of how Mr. Johnston gave up his school and devoted himself to writing for an income about one-tenth this size is an interesting one. He told it to me in response to my questions.

HOW CATHOLICISM MADE AN AUTHOR.

Said he: "I like the profession of teaching very much, and I looked upon it as my life work. I never thought of making money by writing for pay, and it was not until I came to Baltimore that I could write anything which had a real money value. I left Georgia on account of the death of my daughter. We loved her dearly, and I could not endure life amid the old associations without her. I gave up my school and moved to this city and began teaching here. About forty of my boys came from the South to Baltimore to enter my school, and had I not changed my religion I would probably be teaching today. Some time after I came here, however, I grew convinced that my religious ideas were wrong, and from being an Episcopalian I was converted to Catholicism and became a member of the Catholic Church. The most of my students were Episcopalians, and when their parents learned of the change in my religious belief they withdrew their sons from the school, and the result was that I eventually gave up teaching. In the meantime I had written some short stories, which were published in a Southern magazine which was then printed here in Baltimore. These now form a part of my book known as 'The Dukesborough Tales.' They attracted attention, but I never thought of their having any money value until one day Mr. Allen, the editor of

Harper's Magazine, asked me what I had received for them. He was surprised when I told him that I had written them for nothing, and he said that he would be glad to have me do some writing for Harper's, and that if I could give him stories like those he would pay for them. I then wrote some stories for Harper's. They were published and paid for, and I have been writing from that time to this. My first story was published after I was fifty years of age."

HIS CHARACTERS REAL MEN AND WOMEN.

As Richard Malcome Johnston said this, I looked into his bright blue eyes and could not realize that he was more than seventy years of age. It is true that his hair and mustache are frosted silver, but his cheeks are rosy with health and his voice has the silvery ring of youth. He is a straight, fine looking man, and he is full of enthusiasm and life. He is modest in the extreme concerning himself and his work, and he told me that it was a continual surprise to him that his stories were accepted by the magazines. "I suppose," said he, "it is because they are to a large extent of historical value. They picture a people and a time which is fast passing away. They are true to life, and they are merely my remembrances of the people of my boyhood. The dialect which I use is the language of the people among whom I was raised, and my characters are real characters, with their names changed. In no place in the world will you find more individuality than among the middle class or hill people of Georgia, and my stories represent these people as they existed about fifty years ago. They are not crackers or poor white trash, but are the ordinary well-to-do middle class, types of which you may still find in some of the rural districts of my state. I love them, and they know it."

HOW HE WRITES.

I asked Mr. Johnston something as to his habits of work.

He replied that he wrote all of his stories with his own hands. Said he: "I compose very slowly, and I revise a great deal. I do not see how an author can do good work by dictation. I am sure I could not, and I think perhaps Frank Stockton and some of the other writers of the day who dictate would do better work if they wrote with their pens. As for me, I compose my stories with my pen in hand. I start them and let them shape themselves. I take up a character or an incident of my experience, and by working at it and changing it this way and that it finally comes into the finished shape in which it goes to the printer. I am very particular as to the names of my characters, and I think that a name should fit the character, just as a glove fits the hand. In writing I take the first name that comes to me. It does not perhaps suit, but I go on with the rest of the story, changing the names and rechanging them as I revise it, until the names at last seem to me to fit the characters. It is a surprise to me that the people like my writings. I am not satisfied with them myself, and I am always diffident about reading them in public. I never read them myself, and I don't like to read them to others. Still I do it, but until I find that my audience shows some interest in them I am bashful and backward. I feel very foolish when I begin reading on the

platform, and this feeling does not disappear until there is some decided interest manifested by the audience."

FUN AMID GLOOM.

"Your stories are full of fun, Mr. Johnston," said I. "I have laughed a great deal over them."

"Indeed," was the reply. "Well, do you know that I seldom laugh when I am writing them, and some of my best work and that which is said by the people to be the most full of fun has been done under the saddest of circumstances. I am naturally of a melancholy temperament. I must have society, and I want to get away from myself. One of my funniest stories was composed shortly after I came here from Georgia. I was distracted at the time with grief over the death of my daughter. I feared, as to the result of my change of residence, and it is a wonder to me now that I was able to write at all at the time."

"Do you think it a mistake that you did not begin writing at a younger age?" said I.

"I don't know," was the reply, "I doubt whether I would have written any better if I had begun sooner. I feel intellectually as strong today as I ever did, and I write as easily. All of my writing has, you know, been done within the past twenty years, and during that time I have written seventy-five short stories and several books."

HOW STORY WRITING PAYS.

"How about the profits of literature?"

"There is not a great deal of money in my writing for me," replied Mr. Johnston. "I mean I don't make from \$15,000 to \$20,000 a year by my reading and writing, as Bill Nye or James Whitcomb Riley are said to do. If I get from \$1,500 to \$2,000 per year I think it is more than I am worth. I receive for my work from \$25 to \$35 per thousand words, and a short story pays me usually \$150 and upwards, according to its length and character. It seems to me a great deal for them."

"I find it more difficult to write a short story than a long one. In writing a short story you have to make every word tell. You must be very concise, and I think that conciseness is the great secret of success in good writing. I like short stories better than long ones, though I would rather turn out one long story than two short ones. I don't find, however, that I am a success as a book-maker. My stories have been put into book shape in a number of cases, and they usually sell somewhere from 2,000 to 3,000 copies. They don't run much above this."

THE DIALECT STORY.

"What do you think of the dialect story?"

"It seems to me that the people do not care so much for it as they did in the past. My stories are in dialect, for this is needed in order to describe the people of whom I write. We people of the South are fond of our dialect, and a party of well educated Georgia men, when talking socially together, will often drop into the dialect of their boyhood. During the days when Alexander Stephens was in Congress, a number of well-known Georgians often dined with him at the National hotel. I was sometimes present with them, and any one to have heard our conversation would have put us down as ignorant and uncultured. There is a charm about the old dialect