

WORTHERN MESSENGER

DEVOTED TO TEMPERANCE, SCIENCE, EDUCATION, AND LITERATURE.

VOL. XXXI, No. 20.

MONTREAL AND NEW YORK, SEPTEMBER 25, 1896.

30 Cts. Per An. Post-Paid.

HOW I SERVED MY APPRENTICESHIP AS A MAN OF LETTERS.

(By Frank R. Stockton.)

Serving an apprenticeship to literature, if the first stages of a literary life may be so called, began in my case at an earlier age than that at which any boy or girl should be apprenticed to an ordinary trade. My first literary composition was not strictly original, for it came through a desire to get from some of my favorite authors more than they would give me.

When I began a book that I liked, I did not want the story ever to stop. I remember some volumes by Miss Jane Porter, extraordinarily thick and fat which delighted me merely to look at, because even the most rapid reader would require a long time to get to the end of such books.

Now, 'Charles O'Malley' was one of my favorite books, but it ended before I was satisfied with the story, and I think my first literary composition of any importance was an addition to this novel. I undertook the extension of the book in company with two young friends, one of whom suggested incidents for the new chapters, and the other drew some startling illustrations.

Only a few chapters of this projected elongation were completed, but in those our favorite hero made his hunter jump some higher fences than those mentioned in the original work, and bound over streams of water much wider than any at which Mr. Lever would have dared to put the horse of one of his heroes. Of course in these new chapters the story was made as much like the original as it was possible, in the case of a small boy who was following an experienced writer; and thus the work had its uses as a piece of practice.

As I grew older, Dumas and Hans Christian Andersen became my favorite authors, and my first literary work which was successful enough to get into print, was a short story of French life written in the closest and most conscientious imitation of Dumas; in fact, had any one mistaken it for a translation from that author, or even from any French writer, I should have considered it the highest praise.

But this piece of work did not please me long. Reading it in print, it occurred to me that there was really nothing in it which any French author who had ever had his work printed would be willing to father; besides, my companions praised it very mildly; it was plainly their opinion that Dumas could have written the story better.

THE PLEASANT COMPANY OF FAIRIES.

I had always a great liking for fairy-tales, especially those of Hans Christian Andersen, and when I came to compose,—and I constructed a great many stories before I wrote any—I was naturally inclined to follow at a very, very great distance, the path of that great master. But it was not long before a book came into my hands, a collection of fairy tales, written by a literary man who was evidently a close student of Andersen, and his stories, although very good indeed, so closely resembled the work of the author of 'The Ugly Duckling,' that I saw very plainly the danger which lies before the earnest student who essays work in his master's line.

birds, but I obliged those creatures to infuse into their extraordinary actions, a certain leaven of common sense.

I think the first encouragement my literary work ever received was given to these early fairy-tales. I belonged at the time to a literary society composed of youths, many of whom possessed high intellectual tastes and ambitions. They read a great deal, generally the English classics, and those who wrote inclined toward poetry. The first use I intended to make of my fairy-tales was to read them before this society, and I did so with doubts as to their reception.

I was afraid my associ-

was entered against their being considered legitimate fairy-tales.

Another piece of work which I did about this time, was of an entirely different character. It was not intended for young readers, nor for those older readers who take pleasure in work designed for the young. It was addressed to those who were in love, or who were liable at any time to fall in love, and who would therefore take an interest in lovers in a story.

But I wanted to make it different from the ordinary love-story; therefore I treated it after a fashion which pleased me, and which was diametrically opposed to the method I had employed in the fairy-tales. Into the incidents and among the characters of real life I introduced an element of fancy, and this so utterly ruined the story for the ordinary editor that it was not until I had sent it to nearly all the magazines in the United States that I succeeded in getting it printed in the Southern Literary Messenger, of Richmond. This acceptance, though without pecuniary results, was of practical advantage to me, for I was asked to write a short serial for that magazine, which, although the scene was laid in France, was not treated after the manner of Dumas.

For years after that, whenever I have been able to do so, I have continued to write tales, some for young people and some for older people, and in general these were all constructed upon the two lines which I had chosen for my work; one, the world of fancy invaded by the real; the other, the world we live in as seen through spectacles of more or less fantastic colors.

In the course of time I entered the life of journalism, and this, instead of assisting me in my strictly literary work, greatly interfered with it. When I was engaged in affairs which had no connection whatever with literature, composition and writing in my leisure hours were a recreation and a rest; but after a day of work upon a daily newspaper, I had little inclination, even if I had had the strength and the time, for writing stories and tales.

But journalism was an excellent training for my subsequent literary work; I learned much of the mechanism of composition, and much of the habits, customs and influences of the sphere of intellectual culture, which may be termed the literature.

But time passed on from the old that of a week



FRANK R. STOCKTON.

I had determined to write some fairy-tales because my mind was full of them, but when I had finished the book referred to, I resolved that I would never again read a story by Andersen; and from that time to this I have not done so.

I then went to work to write fairy-tales, and in course of time produced several of them which were printed. These were constructed according to my own ideas. I caused the fanciful creatures who inhabit the world of fairy-land to act, so far as it was possible for them to do so, as if they had been inhabitants of the real world. I did not dispense with monsters and enchanters, or talking beasts and

ates might think that I was treating them as children, and young fellows who really were children a few years before, are generally very jealous on this point. But there was no reason for my fears; the tales were well received, and some of the members of the most advanced stage of thought took occasion to say pleasant things about them.

This was great encouragement; if such young men—in my thoughts I omitted the adjective—were satisfied with my work, there was no reason why editors should condemn it; I therefore tried an editor, and with success. The stories were printed, but at the same time a demurrer

Stockton

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