RICHARD MALCOLM JOHNSON.

THE DEAN OF SOUTHERN LETTERS.

The Founder of a School of Fiction—Dialect Writers of the South—Middle Georgia Before the War—Allen Cable and the Creoles.

(WRITTEN FOR THE TRUE WITNESS.)

In that charming and dainty series of books published under the captivating title of "Fiction, Fact and Fancy," and edited by the gifted son of the prince of American literary critics, there is a volume with the companionable name of Billy Downs. It is as follows that Mr. Stedman introduces the creator of Billy Downs and a host of other characters, mostly types of Middle Georgia-life, that shall live with the language. "So we reach the tenth milestone of our ramble, and while we are resting by the wayside let us hail the gentleman who is approaching and ask him for 'another story.' We who have heard him before know that he seldom fails to respond to such a request, and always, too, in a manner quite inimitable. As he comes nearer you may observe the dignified, yet courteous and kindly bearing of a gentleman of the old school. The white hair and moustache, the sober dress, betoken the veteran, although they are almost contradicted by eyes and an innate youthfulness in word and thought. It is not difficult to recognize in Colonel Richard Malcolm Johnston the founder of a school of fiction and the dean of Southern men of letters." The Colonel, as the founder of a school of fiction, if by that school, we understand these, who are depecting for us the Georgia life of the antebellum days. In no otherwise can we assent to Mr. Stedman's phrase. For American critics to claim the dialect school of fiction as their own, in origin or on a par with their other critical achievements. Dialect was born a long time before Columbus took his way westward. The first wave of man kind leaving the parent stock, in their efforts to survive, carried with them the germ of dialect fiction in its portrayal of men and manners. If a given friend was bound to reproduce it faithfully—the very least to give us a semblance of that life. This could not be done in many instances without the use of dialect. To do so were to deprive the portraiture of individuality.

Fiction produced on such lines would be worthless. Of late there has been much cavil against dialect writers. This cavil, strange to say, emanates from the Realists.

They lay down the absurd code, that Art is purely imitative. She plays but a monkey part. Her sole duty is to depict life, paying leading attention to the portrayal of corns, bunions and other horny excresences, that so often accompanies her. Realists will not be persuaded that such ex-resences are abnormal. From a jaundiced introspection of their own little life, they frame canons of criticism to guide the world. With these congenial canons lying before them one is astonished if such a phrase may be used in the recent light of that school's pyrotechnic display. That they can condemn dialect granted, for the sake of argument, that Art is merely imitative, will not the first duty of the novelist be to reproduce the exact language, and that when done by the master hand of a Johnston carries with it not only the speakers tone, but the power of producing a mental image of the speaker—the very acme of the Realists school. To paint a Georgia cracker speaking the ordinary Boston-English would be like crowning the noble brow of a South Sea native with a tall Boston beaver. The effort would be unartistic, the effect ludicrous. Colonel Johnson believes in the imitativeness of Art, to the extent of reproducing for us the peculiar dialect of Middle Georgia. He has informed us that there is not a phrase in his novels that he has not heard amid the scenes of his stories. To reproduce these as a distinct triumph of the novelist's art, but the colonel has done more; into his every character has he breathed a soul. His figures are not the automaton skeletons of the Realists, but living men and women who have earnestly played life, on the circumscribed stage of Middle Georgia.

This life is fast passing away. Prof. Shaler, a competent authority, tells us: "At present the strong tide of moderism is sweeping over the old slave-holding States with a force which is certain to clear away a greater part of the archaic motives which so long held place in the minds of the people. With the death of this generation, which saw the rebellion, the ancient regime will disappear." It can never be lost as long as the novels of Malcolm Johnson are extant. There, in days to come, by the cheery ingle nook will a new generation live over in his delightful pages the curious life of Georgia. Cuvier asked for a bone to construct his skeleton. The readers of the Dukes-borough tales, Billy Downs, etc., will not only have the skeleton, but live men and woman preserved for them by the novelists' elixir. He has known his country and kept close to mother earth, having in his mind that "no language after it has faded into diction, none that cannot suck up feeding juices secreted for it in the rich mother earth of common folk, can bring forth a sound and lusty look. True vigor and heartiness of phrase do not pass from page to page, but from man to man. . . . There is death in the dictionary." That the Colonel's language has sucked up feeding juices secreted for it in the rich mother earth of common folk will be seen on every page. Let us take at random the communication of Jones Kendrick to his cousin Simeon Newsome, as to S'phrony Miller. Sim is a farmer lad overshadowed by the overpowering "dictionary use" of his Cousin Kendrick, Sim has gone a wooin' S'phrony. Kendrick hearing of this and urged by his mother and sister, comes to the conclusion that he would like to have S'phrony himself. This important fact he admits to Cousin Sim in the following choice morsel: Sim is overseeing his hands on the plantation Kendrick approaches and is met by Sim. Kendrick speaks:

"Ma and sister Maria have been for some time specified. They have both been going on to me about S'phrony Miller in a way and to an extent that in some circumstances might be called obstropolus, and to quiet their conscience I've begun a kind of a visitation over there, and my mind has ariv at the conclusion that she's a good, nice piece of flesh, to use the expressions of a man of the world, and society. What do you think, Sim, of the matter under consideration, and what would you advise? I like to have your advice sometimes, and I'd like to know what it would be under all circumstances and appearances of a case which, as it stands, it seems to have, and it isn't worth while to conceal the fact that it does have a tremendous amount of immense responsibility to all parties, especially to the undersigned, referring as is well known in books and newspaper advertisements to myself. What would you say to the above Sim, in all its parts and parties?" It may interest the reader to know that Sim acquiesced "in all its parts and parties," and that S. Phrony became Mrs. Kinderick, while Sim took another mate. Of further interest to the imaginative young woman is the fact, that Mrs. Rewsome and Mr. Kinderick perishing a few years later by some sort of quasi-involuntary but always friendly movements, executed in a comparatively brief time, S. Phrony and Sim became one. In calling Johnson the Dean of Southern men of letters, Stedman does not define his position. Page, the creator of Marse Chan, and one of the most talented of Southern dialect writers, negatively does so. In an article that has literary smack, but lacks critical perception, he rates him below Miss Murfee, James Lane and Allen Cable. These three writers Page places at the head of Southern writers of fiction. Critics, nowadays, will adduce no proof; they simply affirm. The text of this discrimination should be the exactness of the character drawing, the life-like reproduction of environments, and the expertness of the dialect as a vehicle to convey the local flavor. It will hardly be gainsaid that Johnson knows his Georgia no less than Cable knows Louisiana. Johnson is a native of Georgia, the time of life most susceptible to local impressions was spent there. Cable's boyhood was otherwise. It will not be thought of that in the painting of Creole life, Cable has excelled the painter of Georgia life. In the handling of dialect Johnson and Harris touch the high water mark of Southern fiction. It was an old critical dictum that an author to succeed must be in sympathy with his subject; this may be affirmed of Johnson. It is otherwise with Cable, and especially wi h Lane, whose Kentucky pictures are often caricatures. Cable poses as the friend of the colored man. His pose is dramatic. It lends a charm to his New England recitations. We have a great love for champions of every kind. The most of Mr. Cable's pages deal with Creo'e life, and for that life he has no sympathy. He paints it as essentially pagan, albeit it was essentially Catholic. A padre makes him sniff the air and paw ungraciously. The ceremonies of the church are so many pagan rites. Cable belongs to the school that contemns what it does not understand. His pictures of Creole life are untrue, and much as they were in vogue some years ago, are passing to the borne of the forgotten. Johnson, although a living Catholic, fond of his church, and wedded to her every belief, draws an itinerant preacher of the Methodists with as much enthusiasm and sympathy as he would the clergy of his own church. He has no dislikes, nothing that is of man, but interests this sunny-hearted romancer of the old South.

Strange as it may seem, the knowledge of his wonderful power of story-telling came late and in an accidental way. It is best described in his own words, "Story-writing," said the Colonel, "is the last thing for me in literature. I had published two or three volumes on English literature, and in conjunction with a friend had written a life of Alexander Stephens, and also a book on American and European literature, but had no idea of story-writing for money. Two or three stories of mine had found their way into the papers before I left Georgia. I had been a professor of English literature in Georgia, but during the war I took a school of boys. I removed to Baltimore and took forty boys with me and continued my school. There was in Baltimore, in 1870, a periodical called the "Southern Magazine." The first nine of my Dukesborough Tales were contributed to that magazine. These fell into the hands of the editor of Harper's Magazine, who asked me what I got for them. I said not a cent, and he wanted to know why I had not sent them to him. "Reelus Peelers Conditions" was the first story for which I got pay. It was published in the Century, over the signature of Philemon Perch. Dr. Holland told Mr. Gilder to tell that man to write under his own name, adding that he himself had made a mistake in writing under a pseudonym. Sydney Lanier urged me to write, and said if I would do so he would get the matter in print for me. So he took "Reelus Peelers Conditions," and it brought me eighty dollars. I was surprised that my stories were considered of any value. I withdrew from teaching about six years ago, and since that time have devoted myself to authorship. I have never put a word in my book that I have not heard the people use, and very few that I have not used myself. Powelton, Ga., is my Dukesborough. I was born fourteen miles from there.

Of the female characters that I have created, Miss Doolana Lines was my favorite, while Mr. Bill Williams is my favorite among the male characters. I started Doolana to make her mean and stingy like her father, but I hadn't written a page before she wrenched herself out of my hands. She said to me, "I am a woman, and you shall not make me mean." These stories are all of Georgia as it was before the war. In the hill country the institution of slavery was very different from what it was in the rice region or near the coast. Do you know the Georgia negro has five times the sense of the South Carolina negro? Why? Because he has always been near his master, and their relations are closer. My father's negroes loved him, and he loved them, and if a negro child died upon the place my mother wept for it. Some time ago I went to the old place, and an old negro came eight miles, walked all the way, to see me.

He got to the house before five o'clock in the morning, and opened the shutters while I was asleep. With a cry he rushed into the room. "Oh, Massa Dick." We cried in each other's arms. We had been boys together. One of my slaves is now a bishop—Bishop Lucius Holsey, one of the most eloquent men in Georgia." These charming bits of autobiography show us the sterling nature of Malcolm Johnson, a nature at once cheerfulful, kind and loving. It is the object of such natures, in the pessimistic wayfares of life, to make friends, illuminating them with sunshine and tickling them with laughter. Only such a nature could have written:

"There is among mankind a respect for friendship that may be named almost unique. There is no term that indicates pitifulness like friendless. For rare as may be the friendships that are reasonably cemented, and that continue long faithful and fond, yet how few so poor as not to have one or more whom they may justly call friends. To no condition of human life do not friendships of some sort seem to have a necessity peculiar to themselves, differing from and independent of that pertaining to other conditions. The possession of wives and children, the possession or pursuit of riches, power and honor, seldom or ever are satisfactory without the added possession of friends. The divisions that friendships allow in felicities, the solace they impart in miseries, are unlike those in any other relation. Perhaps causes of this are their calmness, their comparative freedom from eagerness—things that render communion among those who feel them, whether often or seldom together, whether dwelling near or remote, so practicable and even."

WALTER LECKY.

Free Trip to Chicago.

Separate W-O-R-L-D-'-S F-A-I-R and use the letters to spell as many words as you can by using the letters as many times as you wish, either backwards or forwards, but not use the same letter in making any one word more times than it appears in "World's Fair."

It is said seventy five small English words can be spelled correctly from the ten letters contained in "World's Fair." Example:—Wad, waif, soar, id l etc. If you are good at word-making you can secure a FREE trip to the World's Fair and return, as The Scott Seed Company will pay all expenses, including R. R. fare, hotel bills, admissions to the Columbian Exposition, and $50.00 in cash for incidental expenses, to the first person able to make seventy words from the letters contained in "World's Fair," as above. They will also give a FREE TRIP to the World's Fair and return with $25.00 for incidental expenses, to the first person sending sixty words as above. They will also give a FREE TRIP to the World's Fair and return [without cash for incidental expenses] to the first person sending fifty-five words.

To the first person sending fifty words will be given $50.00 in cash towards paying expenses to the World's Fair; to the first sending forty words will be given $25.00 in cash towards paying expenses to the World's Fair, to *each* of the first five persons sending thirty five words will be given $10.00 in cash, and to *each* of the first ten sending thirty words will be given $5.00 in cash.

Only one prize will be awarded to the same person. Write your name on list of words [numbered] and enclose the same post-paid wi h ten three-cent stamps for a large package of our Choice English Cottage Garden Flower Seeds.

This combination includes the latest and most popular English flowers of endless varieties [same as will be contained in the elaborate exhibit of English flowers at the World's Fair

This "World's Fair" Contest will be carefully and conscientiously conducted solely for the purpose of introducing our *business*. You will receive the BIGGEST value in flower seeds ever offered, and if you are able to make a good list of words and answer promptly you will have a first-class opportunity to secure a free trip from your home to Chicago and return.

We are spending a large amount of money to start our trade this season, and want your trial order. You will be more than gratified with the result. Send to-day, and address THE SCOTT SEED COMPANY, Toronto, Canada. 38-4.

GOVERNESS: When I was your age I could answer any question in geography. Ethel: But you forget that you had a different governess.

ROOT AND BRANCH,

the poison in your blood, however it may have come or whatever shape it may be taking, is cleared away by Dr. Pierce's Golden Medical Discovery. It's a remedy that rouses every organ into healthful action, purifies and enriches the blood, and through it cleanses and invigorates the whole system. Salt-rheum, Tetter, Eczema, Erysipelas, Boils, Carbuncles, Enlarged Glands, and the worst Scrofulous Sores and Swellings, are perfectly and permanently cured by it.

Unlike the ordinary Spring medicines or sarsaparillas, the "Discovery" works equally well at all seasons. All the year round and in all cases, it is *guaranteed*, as no other blood medicine is. If it ever fails to benefit or cure, you have your money back. You pay only for the *good* you get.

Isn't it safe to say that no other blood-purifier can be "just as good?"

If it were, wouldn't it be sold so?

THE SUNBEAM, a monthly paper for Catholic youth; 50 cents a year, send for sample copy. 761 Craig Street Montreal, P. Q.

Get the Best.

The public are too intelligent to purchase a wortless article a second time, on the contary they want the best! Physician are virtually unanimous in saying Scott's Emulsions is the best form of Cod Liver Oil. 39-2