

## THE AUTHOR OF "THE LADY, OR THE TIGER?"

IT is scarcely four years since Frank R. Stockton broached the enigma of "The Lady, or the Tiger?" and ceasing to be only "a rising young man," realized the complete success which he is now enjoying at the age of fifty-two. As he himself says, his career is an instance of "protracted youth." Before he was twenty he had made up his mind to be an author, and during nearly thirty years of sporadic literary work his nimbus, like the northern lights, had flickered a little this side or that, or momentarily shown a spectacular glow. It was entirely visible to many when the "Rudder Grange" sketches appeared in a haphazard, transient way. But not until the little conundrum of three magazine pages had set everybody talking did he become a celebrity.

Edward Eggleston used to say that Stockton's mind possessed one chamber that had been denied to the rest of mankind. It is certain that nearly everything he has written stands by itself, both for originality of plot and freshness of humor. His unique stories always did hit the mark, but they came at uncertain intervals, and their purpose was fancifully hidden, except for the obvious intention to amuse. But "The Lady, or the Tiger?" was a shaft condensed from the entire Stocktonese, and barbed with a puzzle which in the nature of human things no man could ever solve, and the author as little as any; and to complete the pique of the jest, any woman might solve it for herself, but for no other woman. But that fact did not deter people from trying. A "Lady, or the Tiger?" literature was the result, of which a part found its way into print, while no end of it gave new life to literary and debating societies.

Of course such an excuse for epistolizing the author was not neglected. Some wrote out of curiosity to know the author's opinion; others as an appeal to the superior court. But all the satisfaction the author has been able to give inquirers may be summed in the statement that the story contains everything he ever knew about the incident, and that "If you decide

which it was—the lady, or the tiger—you find out what kind of a person you are yourself."

There was temerity in attempting a sequel to so great a success, but the author came off wondrously well with "The Discourager of Hesitancy." After it was printed nearly everybody who had written him before, inquired by letter whether the prince chose the lady who frowned or the one who smiled. He had once printed a skit called "Every man his own letter-writer," in burlesque of the polite letter-writer, so it may be assumed that he was well prepared to take care of this practical joke on himself.

Of the peculiar traits which determine his personality Mr. Stockton has a monopoly in a greater degree than most men—excepting of his parents, for he belongs to a large family of children. Almost as a matter of course every American Stockton is by birth or descent a New-Jerseyman. In 1656 Richard Stockton came to this country from Cheshire, England. His eldest son, Richard, settled in Princeton, New Jersey, and founded that influential branch. Two other sons made their home in Burlington on the Delaware, a little nearer Trenton than Philadelphia which has always been the metropolis, so to speak, of the Burlington branch. One of the Burlington sons of the elder Richard was named John, and from him by three removes we have Samuel Stockton, the grandfather of the novelist.

This grandfather married Hannah Gardiner, of a well-known New Jersey family. Her great-grandfather was the first Speaker of the general legislature when the two Jerseys were united in one colonial government. His father was one of the original proprietors of the Western Province of New Jersey, member of the Assembly and of the Governor's Council. It is from the Gardiners that Samuel Stockton's descendants have inherited many of their characteristics.

William S. Stockton, the father of Frank R., is remembered in the history of the Methodist Church as one of the most independent and militant of the laity. He was the leader

in the revolt against the Methodist Episcopal polity, and established "The Wesleyan Repository" at Trenton to advocate lay representation. After 1824 the controversy waxed bitter and this Wesleyan reformer was not in the habit of dipping his pen in oil. In 1830 he helped to establish the seceding Methodist-Protestant Church, which gave the laity equal strength and footing with the ministers in the general conference. He was also a fierce controversialist in his character of anti-Jesuit, temperance reformer, and abolitionist, and on the latter score the wing of the church which he had helped to foster was split in 1858, but in 1877 the Northern and Southern churches were reunited. Without being an exhorter, his pen was busy to the last with controversial subjects, and he edited a life of John and Charles Wesley which he himself published. When he was living in Arch street, he would cross to the sunnyside on a hot summer's day, so as to avoid the shadow of the Arch Street Theater.

There is a tradition in the family, that the father in his lifetime read one whole novel and the half of another. In his efforts to fathom the Jesuits he dipped into Eugene Sue's "Wandering Jew," but recoiled from the greater part of it. "Uncle Tom's Cabin" impressed him deeply and satisfied all his cravings for light reading. Religion and religions absorbed his thoughts, and his pastime was gardening.

By two marriages his family was divided into groups of children of varying tastes. The first wife was a Miss Hewlings of Burlington, whom he married very young. She bore him eleven children, only three of whom grew up and married. The eldest of these, the Rev. Dr. Thomas Hewlings Stockton, was one of the most eloquent preachers of his time. During his ministry in Baltimore, he was, for a time, Chaplain of Congress. Henry Clay once said that Dr. Stockton was the greatest pulpit orator he had ever heard. He had a gift for poetry of a deeply religious cast, and his sister Elizabeth often contributed verses to the magazines of thirty years ago.

When William S. Stockton was forty-five he married, for his second wife, Miss Emily Drean of Loudoun county, Virginia, his junior by twenty-five years, and who, on her mother's side, inherited French blood.

Emily Drean bore him nine children, six of whom grew to adult age, including Frank who was the eldest of them. The half-brother and two half-sisters, children of the first wife, were so much older than the second family that their children came about the same time. Their uncle, Wesley Stockton, was the father of twenty children; so out of the two families

and the grandchildren and the neighboring scions of the parallel line, not to mention the visiting Methodist brethren, there were always enough to crowd the board of the Wesleyan patriarch. When the Reverend Doctor with his family came to live with his father, nineteen Stocktons always sat down at one table, and mirth followed close upon the blessing. The father died at the age of seventy-five, his death being the result of an accident; and the second wife lived to be seventy-five.

Francis Richard, as is recorded in the family Bible with much particularity, was born in Philadelphia, at nine o'clock of a Saturday night, which was the 5th of April, 1834. He owes his given names to the romantic taste of his half-sister Emily, who thought him a worthy namesake of Francis I. and Richard Cœur de Lion. His next younger brother, John Drean, the journalist, succeeded in getting named after his maternal grandfather, but the half-sister scored another royalty by naming the literary sister Marie-Louise, after Napoleon's second spouse, but she is known to the reading public as Louise Stockton. Soberer counsels prevailed in the naming of the three other surviving children, who it may be a matter of interest to know have never shown symptoms of the writing fever. One became William S., Jr., another Mary, and the youngest Paul, in honor of the Apostle.

With peculiar solicitude the father kept Frank and John out of Sunday-school from fear of their meeting bad boys. But the Sunday exercises at home surpassed their desires. With two years between them the brothers were literally possessed with one spirit of deviltry, while having two heads and four hands for its execution. Much of their boyhood was passed in the country about Philadelphia, and as is usually the case with large families, the boys of the neighborhood who could keep up the pretense of being good, had the swing of the entire Stockton domain. Six or eight of the most intimate youngsters were initiated by the brothers into a secret society, known as the "A. O. B." and patterned on what was supposed to be the methods of desperate robbers.

One of the duties of the members was to perform strange deeds, such as the midnight conveyance of fruit and food. In pursuing this aim they once ate the mince-meat out of their mother's pies, replacing it with cold mush and carefully fitting on the top crusts. Two Methodist ministers were at the family dinner on the following day, which was Sunday. Frank and John didn't want any pie. They wanted to go, but with fear and trembling awaited developments. As soon as the reverend guests got

the first pieces and began to look dazed, the boys bolted.

While living in Bucks county the boys owned a dog which, of course, was death on cats. In hunting the favorite feline of a dangerous neighbor they were surprised by that watchful person. They fled and expected vengeance, but having heard that the neighbor had a brood of little pigs, they boldly and innocently returned to him and offered to buy a pig. A dollar cooled the man's ire, while the pigling was borne home and placed in the family pen. At feeding-time the boys would watch their chance of keeping back the other pigs with sticks while their little one gorged himself. By this means he grew to be the biggest in the pen and netted them a profit of seven dollars.

Another strange deed of the "A. O. B." was worthy of the future author of "The Reversible Landscape" and "The Remarkable Wreck of the *Thomas Hyke*." During the visit of a cousin, he and Frank and John had to sleep on an old-fashioned, high-posted bedstead. It occurred to them to turn the bedstead upside down so that it stood on its posts instead of its legs, and when the mattress and the bed-clothes were spread on the under, then the upper side, their heads came amusingly near the ceiling. This adventure was attended with some noise, and they had only begun to enjoy the novel situation before they were disturbed by a greatly surprised mother, who made them clamber down the tall posts, and spend the night in an improvised bed on the floor.

William S., Jr., the younger brother, was never allowed to join the secret society. He was an assistant, however, in many strange deeds, and notably by sitting on a bee's nest while the boys ran for switches to fight the insects. As soon as the bees awoke to the fact that it was a boycott, they raised the siege in a hurry and the allies fled with a screaming youngster at their heels.

With his evident genius for practical fun, parents ought to be thankful that Mr. Stockton has never in his stories encouraged the boyish nuisance.

For many years gymnastics and fishing were the principal recreations of the brothers. Frank, though slightly built, had a strong, wiry figure, and despite the lameness which has been with him since he was five, he was a leader in vaulting; for given a chance to use his strong arm as a lever, he could swing himself over wide obstacles.

John was even more athletic, and later in life was fond of breaking the ice for a plunge-bath. While living in New York he once engaged an old boatman near Hell Gate

to row him into the East River, which at the time was spotted with floating ice. Great was the awe of the boatman while his fare leisurely stripped himself, took a dive, and as leisurely climbed in again. But he said not a word until John began to dress, when he exclaimed: "Young man, what you want is a *gardeen!*"

Their early schooling was under private care in West Philadelphia. Then Frank entered the Philadelphia public schools and in his eighteenth year finished with the degree of Bachelor of Arts, at the Central High School. That institution had a president and faculty and among a less modest people would have been called a college. Greek and Latin were a part of the four-years' course, but Frank sided with the modern languages, and for two years after he was graduated continued the study of Anglo-Saxon. It is said that he was not the ambitious boy who is always at the head of his class, but rather the facile scholar who invariably had second place without much effort.

Frank and John were as inseparable in juvenile schemes of authorship as in play. A prime amusement was to begin a story after going to bed and toss it back and forth between them for the benefit of the younger brother lying at the foot. Whenever William nodded he was kicked, because it was a rule that if he staid there at all he must listen.

At the age of ten Frank began the reading of novels, his taste for them being established by a much valued copy of Mrs. Redcliffe's "Mysteries of Udolfo." Somewhat later he wrote his first verses beginning,

"My love she hath a black eye;  
Her lips are cherry red."

His companions laughed at a love with a black eye, and wanted to know how she came by it. When he was fourteen he celebrated the battle of Monterey in verse. About this time he, John and another schoolmate favored a religious weekly published in Baltimore with specimens of original poetry, the return of which convinced them that the editor was an ignorant person who really didn't know good poetry from bad. To test this, they copied out one of Milton's short devotional poems and sent it to the editor, hoping to have some fun with him when he sent it back as not good enough. But the poem was printed with a name other than Milton's, and the boys concluded that after all the editor did know good poetry when he saw it.

About the time of entering the high school he tried his hand at a continuation of "Charles O'Malley." During the course he wrote a prize story which was printed in "The Boys'

and Girls' Journal," and made his first appearance in the weekly "American Courier," as the author of a story in the prevailing French manner. On leaving school he joined the "Forensic and Literary Circle," whose members were thirty or forty ambitious young men. Among them was John A. Dorgan, the poet; W. T. Richards, the marine painter; Professor Riché, and Judges Mitchell and Ashman, of Philadelphia; John D. Stockton, the poet and editor, and many others who have since made a name at the bar and in other professions.

A feature of the weekly meetings of the Circle was a manuscript magazine, for which the "Ting-a-ling" stories were written. Afterward they were printed in "The Riverside Magazine," and eventually made his first book. It is recalled that his father was rather indifferent to the products of his son's fancy, and that, looking into one of Frank's manuscripts, he soon came upon an insect or a bird assisting in the conversation. The father smiled sadly and folded the manuscript.

The Ting-a-ling stories stamped their author as a humorist of delicate and original fancy, but he and his fellow-members were often deadly in earnest, and when he once delivered a lecture before the society and its friends, he chose the subject of "Female Influence," and treated it so solemnly that it is said it saddened the hearts of all who heard it.

"Kate," his first short story of any importance, was read before the society. Some of his friends urged him to publish. He fell in with the idea. Back came the story from the leading magazine with a printed reply. When he had recovered from his surprise he sent it to another magazine, with like result. By this time he was fully resolved to publish, and dispatched the luckless "Kate" in turn to all the other magazines. Those having printed replies sent them back with the MS. As an experienced editor he would doubtless justify the printed form as a necessary and courteous means of editorial explanation; still one instance is remembered where he profaned its honest dignity. A well-known author had visited the sanctum, and forgotten a pair of "rubbers," which were forwarded by messenger. Within the package was found the regular printed reply with this sentence underscored: "*The return of an article does not necessarily imply lack of literary merit.*"

But in the case of "Kate" it was the printed thanks of the editor which seemed to stand between its author and fame. At last the story found favor in the eyes of John R. Thompson, editor of the "Southern Literary Messenger," who frankly said he would print but could not pay. By return mail he was

urged not to hesitate on the latter account. "Kate" in print made a little talk which justified the editor in offering thirty dollars for a serial of three parts, "The Story of Champagne," a French tale with a fanciful plot being the result.

From an early age, Frank had intended to be a physician; but as no doctor had ever been President of the United States, that profession ceased, after a time, to attract him. As a compromise between their father's practical views and their private literary hopes, Frank became an engraver on wood and John an engraver on steel.

Frank had a peculiar way of following his art, especially after his marriage, when he traveled leisurely, enjoying country scenes, and often visited in Virginia. Outdoor scenes, and flowers, fruits, and birds were generally his subjects, though he occasionally engraved portraits. As a rule he did his own drawing on the block. He was a regular contributor of pictures, verse, and prose to "Vanity Fair" and "Punchinello," two New York comic papers that aimed to be like "Punch" and died young. During the engraving period he was steadily at literary work, which was done at night. Finally he appointed a day a long time in advance when he would lay down the burin forever, and he kept the appointment. His brother dropped steel-engraving earlier, and at that time was a newspaper writer.

In 1860 Frank Stockton married, in Philadelphia, Miss Marian E. Tuttle, of Amelia county, Virginia. She was the half-sister of Dr. M. F. T. Evans who had married Frank's half-sister, the doctor's acquaintance with the family having begun while he was a student in Philadelphia. At the battle of Gettysburg Dr. Evans's regiment, the Fourteenth Virginia, was in the van of Pickett's charge upon Hancock's line, where William S. Stockton, Jr., who with other infantrymen was working a gun that had been stripped of cannoners, was taken prisoner by his brother-in-law's regiment; but when the tide of battle quickly turned he escaped. Often each went over a battle-field looking for the other, dead or wounded.

Frank had wished that the war might be averted by a compromise involving the gradual freeing of the slaves, and indemnity to the owners, and he also thought that theoretically a state had a right to secede. In the spring of 1861 he published at his own expense an independent pamphlet called "A Northern Voice," which aimed to assist in settling the difficulty; but the "Voice," which had met with a considerable sale at five cents a copy, was effectually hushed by the firing on Fort Sumter. Before the clash of arms Mrs. Stock-

ton hastened South to visit her relatives. She soon found herself on the Dixie side of the picket-line, and while detained opposite Washington, saw the whole invading army pass into Virginia. With other ladies she was at the time under the protection of the New York Seventh.

John's success in journalism, as well as his own inclinations, had been drawing Frank in the same direction. Having the family taste for horticulture, he was asked to describe that department of the Sanitary Commission's fair for the Philadelphia "Press." One survey of the field showed him that it was too big for his own knowledge; so he asked each exhibitor for brief descriptions of his rarest plants. Collecting these, and licking them into shape with little trouble, he made the hit of all the floral reports, and showed that he possessed the journalistic instinct.

About the time he gave up wood-engraving Jay Cooke was placing the 7.30 government loan. John had influence with the banker and Frank was enlisted to help inculcate the principle that a national debt was a national blessing. With five others he gave his attention to the financial interests of the citizens of New York and gained, if little else, a wide knowledge of the metropolis and its suburbs.

Returning to Philadelphia, he went on "The Morning Post," a paper that had been started by his brother and John Russell Young, and which, in 1872, supported Horace Greeley and fell amid the ruins of that memorable campaign. During his brief newspaper experience he also wrote for the "Riverside Magazine."

In the autumn of 1871 "Punchinello" asked him for a Christmas story and engaged an artist to illustrate it, but the paper died on the threshold of the holidays. He brought the orphaned story to New York and showed it to Dr. Holland, who sent him a moderate sum, which yet seemed so unusually large to the author that he thought he was to share it with the artist. So it happened that "Stephen Skarridge's Christmas," a burlesque on Dickens's imitators, was printed in the January number of this magazine for 1872 and helped to fix his future in New York.

In the same year he became news-editor and writer of short editorials on the family weekly "Hearth and Home," edited by Edward Eggleston. One of its features was a home and children's department conducted by Mrs. Mary Mapes Dodge, and to that he was also a contributor. Of the funny column, "That reminds me," he had full charge.

On the demise of "Hearth and Home," he joined the staff of "Scribner's Monthly" as an

editorial assistant; but in the autumn of 1873 he became Mrs. Dodge's assistant on the new magazine, "St. Nicholas." No serial story had been secured, and without one the magazine could not go forth. The assistant editor produced "What Might Have Been Expected" by working at night after a long day at the office. He used to be afraid that he would break down, and that everybody would then say: just "What might have been expected!" But he did not break down and the story was finished in due time.

Any one who takes a look into this model story for boys and girls will be sure to glean it, if only for the negro character and conversation and for the quiet touches of humor. Wherever he has touched negro character as here and in "The Late Mrs. Null," the canvas fairly pulses with vigor and humor. And they are all studies from the life obtained during many visits to his wife's family home in Amelia county, in the "black belt" of Virginia, where the colored people are about ten to every white person. Here, at a backwoods cross-roads called Paineville, the "Akeville" of "What Might Have Been Expected," was a chance to study the unmixed, old-fashioned negro with the romancing tongue of Peggy, and the fussy superstitions of Aunt Patsy and Aunt Judy. The latter was first used in "What Might Have Been Expected," of which Aunt Matilda, Uncle Braddock, and the youngster John William Webster were both real characters and veritable names. As each part of the story came out it was read down there within hearing of the assembled prototypes, and great was their pride when their names were sounded. Two namesakes in the negro colony attest the favor in which "Mr. Frank" is held.

Both the character and incidents of that delightful negro story "The Cloverfields Carriage" are real and belong to Paineville. "The Story of Seven Devils" was suggested to him by the narrative of an old negro; and the droll sketch "An Unhistoric Page," which in 1884 gained the "Youth's Companion" prize of \$500 for the best humorous story, belongs to his Amelia county sojourn.

After a visit of recuperation to Florida and Nassau he wrote "A Jolly Fellowship," his second serial for "St. Nicholas." It abounds in lively descriptions and adventures and is ingenious; but of all his writings for children it is the only story, to my thinking, with little interest for older heads.

Two or three of the travel papers collected in "Roundabout Rambles," refer to the same trip. These approach the vein of his short stories, but never reach the high level of his imaginative writings. Apparently he must have his own stage, his own plot, and his own

people, real yet of the fancy, or even purely whimsical, in order to produce that peculiar fusion of reality, fancy, philosophy and humor which is the true Stocktonese.

His second Christmas story, written for this magazine, and printed in January, 1872, is called "The Pilgrims' Packets," and ends in an enigma. In more than one respect it was a forerunner of "The Lady, or the Tiger?" It contains at the outset a bit of mental autobiography, for the tall pilgrim, who, like the two others, has written a story that nobody will appreciate, complains that "the Materialists and Rationalists of Literature will have none of me. They object to my machinery and send me to the children. But I have nothing for children. There is a moral purpose running through my story — a purpose for maturest minds."

He is never loath to explain that from the first adventure of the fairy Ting-a-ling, through "The Floating Prince" series, and down to the recent story of "The Griffin and the Minor Canon," all of his marvelous tales were written for grown people. But when editors of "grown-up" magazines have objected to his "machinery," he has been compelled to carry them to the children, who, to be sure, carry them direct to the grown people. In large part the humor of his fairy stories depends upon their travesty of the traditions of fairy literature; something that only the adult or maturing mind can fully enjoy; but with the humor, there is always a story of incident which satisfies a child's love of adventure and of the marvelous.

His minor stories show a progression from fairy tales to what the author, with a special liking for the kind, calls "fanciful tales." But he has always avoided the big and little immortals, and purely barbarous incidents which characterize the fairy legends of tradition, as handed down by Grimm, and softened and beautified by Andersen. His fairies are human beings of exaggerated traits and powers. There is no "quick-as-a-wink" or fairy wings about their travels. If they have business requiring dispatch they must saddle a grasshopper or a butterfly and obey the laws of inertia and gravitation. When they climb it is by something more tangible than a streak of light from sun or star. At the time he sent his first fairy story to the "Riverside Magazine," the rules of fairy fiction were regarded with the old reverence for the Greek unities, and the editor thought it necessary to apologize for his contributor by explaining in a sub-heading that the story was only "a make-believe fairy tale."

A moral purpose may be discovered underneath the fanciful tales, but it is never

obtruded. For instance, "The Griffin and the Minor Canon," may be construed as teaching the repression of harmful tastes. There is nothing the Griffin so much desires as to make one mouthful of the Minor Canon, and if he does not do so at once, it is because his purpose to eat him is so settled that he thinks he can afford to humor conscience, which nevertheless always gets the better of his appetite. And in "The Queen's Museum" the man apprenticed to a hermit loathes the business. The desire of his soul is to become a terrible robber; yet he remains a hermit, and has the satisfaction of robbing robbers as a reward of virtue.

Every grown fool, even, knows that children are wiser than they look; but few wise men have shown such trust in the youthful understanding as Mr. Stockton, who has never thought it necessary to "write down to children." The little son of a publisher was chatting one day with the author of "Ting-a-ling," and expressed great liking for the story of the maiden whose head was put on wrong, so that she faced backwards, until a prince, taking pity on her, kissed her. It was the first time a young man had kissed her, and it *turned her head*. "It was enough," said the little commentator, "to turn any girl's head."

A youthful admirer of the stories once wrote to ask if it were not true that Mr. Stockton had a large family of children who always heard the stories told before they were written out, and who gave the inventor "points" as to the things children in general would and would not like. It would be interesting to know the comments of this young philosopher on learning that Mr. Stockton's children are all in his books, and that the position of juvenile oracle, as well as literary critic, is held by Mrs. Stockton, in whose autograph the author's always dictated writings are dressed.

By virtue of a good memory and methodical habits of composition his work goes forward without much regard to surroundings and interruptions. The story of "The Transferred Ghost" was written within ten days in six different houses in the suburbs of New York. For six years his summers were spent in the Virginia mountains at "Lego," a country mansion near Monticello, and once part of the estate of Thomas Jefferson. On the spacious lawn there was an immense cherry-tree, around which stood three stakes like the feet of a tripod. One end of a hammock was tied to the trunk of the tree and the other end moved from stake to stake, according to the position of the sun. In that hammock the author of "The Lady, or the Tiger?" spun many a yarn,

while his wife spread it upon paper, on one of Thomas Jefferson's writing-tables.

Before a word is put upon paper his story, long or short, is invented, molded and finished, even down to the points and often to the full text of the conversations. While in the clay state the most radical changes may take place; but once finished it remains firmly traced in the author's memory, ready to be dictated at any time. As an illustration, "The Late Mrs. Null" was begun a year ago on the 9th of February, and interrupted by a serious illness and the crowding in for prior attention of eight short stories. Yet his first novel was virtually composed before pen was put to paper. It was completed finally in November, 1885.

Mr. Stockton's habit of dictating was acquired when his days were given to editing. Then it rested him to be able to register his ideas without the intervention of a pen. Now, he would find it difficult to write freely in any other way. With the regularity of the clock he begins his morning's work at ten. If he is drawing on his store-house of finished stories he dictates for two hours and a half, seldom longer. But if he is composing he gives his thoughts entirely to himself, with the same regularity as to time, and perhaps for many days together. Few changes, and these only verbal, are made in the first written draft; and while he always seeks to find the word of all words that would lend felicity and vigor to a phrase, he never polishes. Once penned, a story is seldom kept over night, but is at once sent to its destination. In the afternoon he goes forth for recreation and acquaintance with the world that he paints. He studies character everywhere, and in an imaginative way is as much given to models as any graphic artist. It will be remembered that in "Our Story," the supposed author-hero says that the characters "were to be drawn from life, for it would be perfectly ridiculous to create imaginary characters when there were so many original and interesting personages around us."

That theory is helped out by the origin of the ever delightful "Rudder Grange," which must stand as a master-piece of fanciful, refined comicality, profound enough in its way to entitle the author to a seat in the American Academy. Nearly all of its incidents and characters are real. But who else would have seen fun and philosophy in them and touched them with the same life-giving art? Surely in its quiet, wholesome, fireside humor this book is inimitable. You may hear strangers in public places and friends in social privacy use precisely the same words, "The funniest book I ever read." And you may hear peo-

ple recommend it to friends much as you would a side-splitting farce capitally acted, and soon to go off the boards. But the guffaw way of viewing it misses half the flavor and nearly all the intention; for "Rudder Grange" is, if you like, a profound treatise by a professor of human nature, who is aware that the most trivial proceedings of mankind need only to be dressed in the true motives, to become amusing and instructive to an illuminating degree. Therefore it is enough if the appreciative reader cons it with a contemplative smile, heightened, to be sure, by a mellow laugh, when the group on the wood-shed roof are found besieged by Lord Edward, when Pomona is reading, when Pomona gets the better of the lightning-rod man, and when the borrowed baby is chucked under the buggy-seat.

Americans have so much exercise in laughing, and are so respectful of the opportunity, that they do not always take the trouble to look behind the jest. When Edmund Gosse was in this country he was reported in "The Critic" as saying that he thought Stockton's "originality, his extraordinary fantastic genius, has not been appreciated at all"; which was not so true as his added remark that "people talk about him as though he was an ordinary purveyor of comicality"—if we may omit the word ordinary. But his writings will outlive a thousand laughs, because fun is only their color, and not their substance. Their substance is human nature thrown into relief by a glass which imparts a comical hue. His humorous view is broad and not epigrammatic, though wit lurks in the felicity of his terse sentences. And the same gravity of mien which in his writings never betrays his humorous intention is peculiar to the man.

With large dark eyes, features angularly strong and varied, and a face of great sensibility, his speech is intensely practical and idiomatic, and his usual manner serious to the verge of sadness. But when his eyes look outward they always smile; his deep, quiet voice is ever the voice of leisure and geniality, even when the situation demands the sarcasm it gets. When fun is going forward his eyes laugh heartily; but even when his face shows that he is convulsed his merriment is almost soundless. It is the laughter of a man whose risibles have lost their voice through a persistent habit of laughing to himself.

In "Rudder Grange" he found a theme exactly suited to his fancy, otherwise it would be a matter of wonder that so artistic a work should have had so happy-go-lucky an origin. The first "Rudder Grange" paper was written early in the autumn of 1874, when he was work-

ing very hard as assistant editor of "St. Nicholas" and finishing its first serial. It was printed in the following November number of "Scribner's Monthly," and doubtless would have been the last as well as the first of its series, if it had not gone straight to the public heart. The next paper, which was illustrated, did not appear until the following July. This as well as each of the succeeding chapters was in form capable of serving as the conclusion of the series; yet bound together as they twice have been, they form a symmetrical work of art. The book was published plainly in 1879, and last year\* in worthy form, charmingly illustrated by Mr. Frost, whose own figure, always with the face concealed, has served as the model for the hero.

As to the reality of the characters and incidents, it is enough to say that the house-hunting so amusingly described at the outset of "Rudder Grange" was drawn from the experience of the author and his wife in ransacking New York and its suburbs for a suitable habitation. In the search they discovered a poor man's family snugly housed in an old canal boat tied to the mud bank of Harlem river. In imagination the poor man was ousted and the author and his wife moved in with the domestic experiences they were acquiring in a house they had rented at Rutherford Park, New Jersey. But the initial fact of the story was a book on domestic affairs, called "The Home — How to Furnish a House on a Thousand Dollars," which Mr. and Mrs. Stockton had together written and published without profit. There was nothing imaginary in the gentle satire aimed at that enterprise and at the difficulty of furnishing a house according to their own manual. The boarder was a verity, as was also Lord Edward, the author's only canine character. Pomona was based on the romantic mind and eccentricities of a real maid-of-all-work; and Old John is living out there still. There are those who are privileged to suspect that Euphemia is no fiction, and that the author, who is always partial to his heroines, and usually gives them three-fourths of the quality and nearly all the sovereignty of his universe, has in this instance been modestly chary of the original.

While abroad for two years from 1882, the author experimented with the Rudder Grangers as foreign tourists, and with only moderate success. But he wrote amid foreign scenes some of his best short stories, like "The

Remarkable Wreck of the *Thomas Hyke*," "Our Story," "A Tale of Negative Gravity," and "His Wife's Deceased Sister." This last bit of cleverness was no fiction as regards the central idea, because a story he much liked, called "My Bull-Calf," had been refused by an editor on the ground that it was not so good as its preceding story, "A Tale of Negative Gravity."

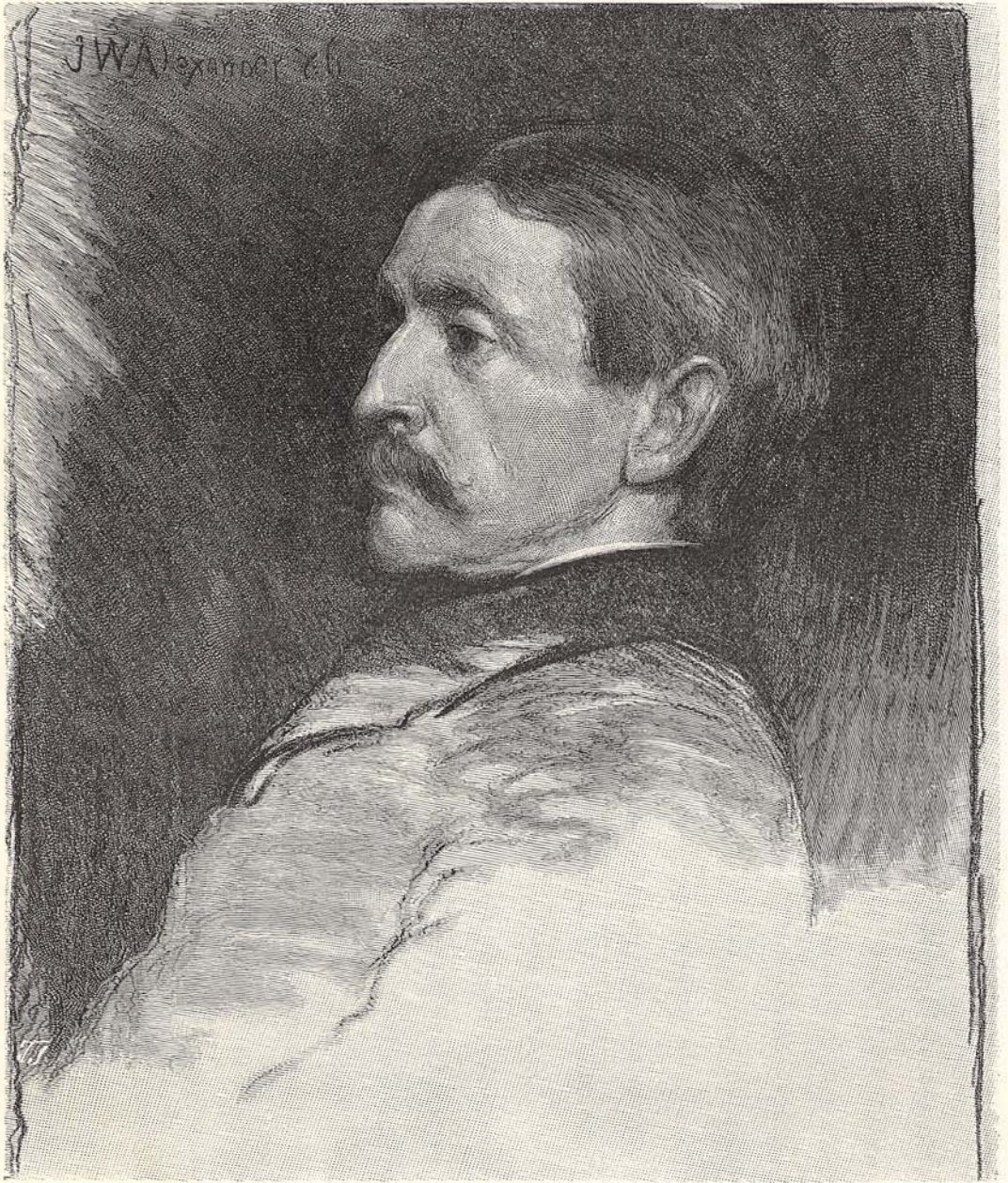
Of "The Late Mrs. Null,"\* everybody has just made an opinion or is forming one. It has been praised with the criticism that it is too clever, and running over with prodigality of invention and surprises of situation. Possibly it is like some paintings which would not be so interesting if they were more perfect works of art. Its negro characters are so racy and so wonderfully distinct that the white ones suffer a little by comparison, but that fault, if it is a fault, is partly chargeable to the civilization which puts a premium on conventionality. Peggy, Aunt Patsy, Letty, and Uncle Isham are unconscious and original beings, while the unromantic Lawrence Croft, the quite lovable and interesting Roberta March, the scheming and attractive Annie, the eccentric Mrs. Keswick and her elusive nephew Junius, are all flesh and blood of a self-conscious, calculating order. There is skill in the love-story, which is fresh and fascinating, and not a little instructive. To be sure, in the middle of the novel the reader scents a fox-chase of a plot, and shortly has the suspicion forced upon him that there isn't even a fox, but that the author has made an ingenious trail with an anise-seed bag. But soon confidence is restored by a remarkable surprise, one of the neatest strokes of which is the clever little allegory, which reconciles the reader to an astonishingly sudden use of the adage, "Off with the old love; on with the new." As for old Mrs. Keswick's revenge, that both amuses and staggers.

Though "The Late Mrs. Null" is a little uneven in texture, as might be expected of a first novel from a hand long practiced in the form of the short story, we may still think it the author's deepest and broadest work. It certainly proves that he is perfectly at home in the region of novels, and it is no secret that his studio is now set with large canvases. And if satiety of success should prompt him to lay down the brush, let us hope that the voice of "The Discourager of Hesitancy" will be heard at his elbow whispering, "I am here."

\* Charles Scribner's Sons.







Frank R. Stockton