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LITERARY WASHINGTON.

WILL THE CAPITAL BECOME THE NATIONAL CENTER OF LETTERS?

Walter Wellman Thinks It Will and Gives His Reasons—"The Neighbors" Club—Librarian Spofford—Mrs. Springer and Her Poetry—Her Love of the Sea.

WASHINGTON, May 23.—As a literary center the national capital is rapidly becoming noted throughout the world. It has no large publishing interest, other than that maintained by the government, but a large number of writers live and work here.



LIBRARIAN SPOFFORD.

The fortnightly meetings during the winter months bring together many of the brightest men and women of the capital. Here may be seen such famous persons as Mrs. Frances Hodgson Burnett, who lives in a charming house on Massachusetts avenue, with the families of the chief justice, Attorney General Miller and any number of senators on either side of her; George Kennan, the Russian specialist, much of whose mail from Russia and Siberia comes to Washington disguised under bogus prescriptions; Joaquin Miller, who used to have a log cabin on the hills overlooking the city, and Mrs. E. D. E. N. Southworth, the novelist, who lives in a quaint old house in quaint old Georgetown.

At one of these "Neighbors" meetings there recently met four persons who are engaged in writing the lives of a trio of great men of the war era—John Hay and John E. Nicolay, authors of the Century "Life of Lincoln"; George Gorham, who is engaged upon a "Life of War Secretary Edwin M. Stanton," and Mrs. Katherine Chase, who is writing the life of her father, the great chief justice. Many newspaper men may be seen in these gatherings, among the more conspicuous of them being Charles Nordhoff, of The New York Herald, who, to his \$10,000 a year salary from Mr. Bennett, adds many thousands from his pen. A lucky man, Mr. Nordhoff, for his newspaper work takes but a mere fragment of his time. Weeks often go by without a line from him appearing in print; but if there are diplomatic disturbances or international complications, Mr. Nordhoff is expected to be heard from, and this is an expectation which is rarely disappointed. The field of diplomacy is peculiarly his own.

George Alfred Townsend is often seen with "The Neighbors." He is the greatest newspaper correspondent which this country has produced, so great that when his work is mediocre or inferior, as it sometimes is, of course, it sells as readily as ever and is read with almost as much avidity. Townsend is one of those correspondents who learn little but think much; a single fact passing through his mental hopper is broken into fifty parts, and each one is swollen up with the imagination to be as large as its parent. "I am more than a telephone between talkers and readers," Townsend said at one of "The Neighbors" meetings; "I am a phonograph, into which ten thousand men have talked, and their recorded conversations are a storehouse, on which I draw at will by simply turning the crank."

The government incidentally encourages authorship. Some of the best writers of the day, most earnest and best equipped specialists, are government employes. There is Librarian Spofford, of the great national literary manuscript. He does not write much, because he has not the time. He is one of the busiest, one of the most remarkable men in Washington. From morning till night he stands at his desk in the big library, giving personal attention to the details of work. One would think the responsible head of a great institution like this would content himself with mere management; but not so with Spofford. He will take your application for a book and either get it for you himself or send one of his assistants. Lucky for you sometimes that Spofford is there,



UNDER THE SEA WALL.

For all the hundreds of thousands of books and pamphlets in the library there is not one which he does not know as well as he knows the thoroughbred horse which he rides every fair day. He knows these books so well that he can tell you the range of their contents, the names of authors, date of publication, and the

comparative value of works on a given subject. Spofford is such a complete and infallible index to the entire library that senators and representatives have a habit of going to him and saying: "Mr. Spofford, I am looking up this or that subject—where shall I find it?" And without a moment's hesitation the librarian calls off the names of a half dozen or dozen books, and sends for them. The whole library is before him like the pieces on a chess board, and, of course, this is much better for the senator or representative than consulting indexes.

"Look in the index!" exclaimed Senator Edmunds the other day, in the library; "oh, no; not while Spofford is here. He is the only index I want. There are no typographical mistakes or cloudy references in him, and, besides, he is brought down to date."

When Spofford dies, as he must some day die—and that soon, I fear, unless he gets away from his desk—the library will suffer a loss beside which the destruction of a hundred thousand volumes would be a mere trifle. The hundred thousand volumes could be replaced; Spofford could not be.

Just now Washington literary circles are talking about a new poet that has sprung up in their midst. One of the conceits of "The Neighbors" club is an anonymous box, in which bits of poetry are dropped by modest authors to be read at the next meeting. Out of this box have come such a large number of poems and songs that were obviously from the same pen, all breathing the breath of genius and singing principally of the sea, that no little curiosity has been aroused concerning their authorship. The members mentally scanned the roster of the club in search of the man or woman whose early life had been passed within sound of ocean's roar, never suspecting that such exquisite songs of the surf could come from a landsman. Now the secret is out, and the author is none other than Mrs. Springer, wife of the member of congress from Springfield, Ills.

At a recent meeting of "The Neighbors" a sketch of Mrs. Springer, "dreaming the hours away" under the sea wall at Fortness Monroe, was presented the club by a young artist, and Rev. W. H. Milburn, the blind chaplain of the house of representatives, spoke feelingly of the poetess. "It is not strange," said he, "that one bred upon the prairies of the west, as she was, knowing the ocean only by hearsay for many years, should be prepared to yield her heart to its mighty charm. The boundless plains of her native land, whose gentle undulations resemble the long swell of the sea, their verdure almost matching its hue, their groves easily mistaken for islands that lie to rich and various gems inlay the unadorned bosom of the deep," would school the eye and mind of Mrs. Springer to see and tell of things invisible to most of us when she came to stand by the multitude of great waters, through which she beholds Jehovah riding upon his horses and chariots of salvation."

One night last winter "The Neighbors" honored Mrs. Springer by giving tableaux of one of her pathetic poems—a poem, by the way, that had come out of the "anonymous box" and moved all listeners to tears:

'Twas night in a little village— A village down by the sea; And the clouds hung low, Drifting to and fro, And the wind moaned drearily.

The storm came down; the gun was fired; a ship was seen on the breakers; but cabin and deck were empty of strong hearts and hands eager to do all in their power to save the imperiled lives. But the sea rolled in so madly that even the life boat could not be launched.

Like a straw in the breath of the tempest, 'Twas thrown back on the strand. The women wept in anguish, And raised their hands in prayer; For every heart was stricken With that sharp cry of despair.

The cry of a child had been heard from the wreck; its plaintive notes had inspired the men on shore to redoubled but vain efforts. The life boat still lay upon the beach.

Hark! Some over the waters, Ringing out strong and clear, Came the voice of a woman singing! And listening, they could hear The words in the lull of the tempest. (Oh, love so unselfed!)

They knew 'twas the voice of the mother Singing to calm her child. And as she sang to her darling— Knowing that death was so near— She caught the words she so needed, Her own heart to strengthen and cheer.

"Hold! Then 'Thy cross before my closing eyes!" They knew she sang, though they could hear no more.

Then came a hulk, and clear as clear could be, "Heaven's morning breaks, and earth's vain shadows flee;" And strong and full, like prisoned bird set free—

"In life, in death, O Lord, abide with me!" A heavier surge of the breakers—they heard the voice no more.

And though they watched and waited, Nought but the breakers' roar And the moan of the wind, now dying, Came to the listening ear; And they knew the voice of the singer They never again should hear.

And when the night had waded, And morn came, cold and gray, On the wet sand, near the mooring, A fair, dead woman lay.

To her heart was still enfolded A tiny fair haired girl, With face like a wisp of flower, And pure as an ocean pearl.

And the sun broke through the shadows, And looked on the dead and smiled; And they knew as they knelt about her 'Twas the singer and her child.

Mrs. Springer is one of the most lovable women of the capital, and one of the most popular. She is the author of several successful novels. Her literary income is wholly devoted to charity. Ten or fifteen years hence, no doubt, Washington will be the literary center of America. Already it is becoming the seat of learning, with its great universities, libraries and museums. Here, too, writers are discovering, may society and character from all parts of the country be advantageously studied.

HENRY W. GRADY'S NOVEL.

He Had His First Chapter, Here Outlined, Written When He Died.

New York, May 23.—Henry W. Grady's literary fame rests upon his newspaper work. His journalistic "knack" and tact were alike wonderful. His instinct of timeliness and his sympathetic intuition enabled him to seize upon every popular topic "living as it rose." His picturesque, colorful style gave a grace to every subject.

"Why don't you write a novel?" was a question he was often asked. "I have one on the stocks," he would answer, laughing. "Let me have a little bit of leisure—a June month in the country, thirty winter evenings by my ain fireside and you'll see a novel that will astonish you."

The month of leisure seemed never to come to him. The novel never got off "the stocks." Once he sketched the outline of it for me. Dickens was Mr. Grady's first and last love, and his embryo novel was Dickensian in plot and style, with a Doolittle mystery brooding over it to the end.

The opening chapter showed a man—a "solitary horseman"—traveling a lonely road through the night and storm. He crossed a roaring river, and saw by a flash of lightning a large house, set a little back from the road, with wind blown trees about it. The blinds of the house were closed; no light issued from it, but suddenly, as the traveler looked, there came a wilder gust of wind, the shutters of one of the windows was blown violently back, and the traveler had a glimpse of the lighted interior.

That one glimpse was full of horror. It showed the climax of a tragedy. A man stabbed to death by another man; two women standing near, one still and stern, the other stretching her arms imploringly and sending forth a shriek that sounded above the storm.

In another half minute the blind was blown back to its place and all was dark again. Before the stunned traveler could recover himself a fierce flash and peal of thunder had startled his horse. It took a few minutes to quiet him, then the horseman dismounted, opened the great gate of the yard and hurried to the house. His knock on the door was answered almost at once by a black servant, who showed him into a room—the very room in which he had just seen a bloody murder committed. He looked around in amazement. No sign of murder or violence was here. No blood, no body; no rage or terror in the faces that turned upon him. He saw a cozy room, a cheerful fire, a family group; a young woman at the piano; a young man standing beside her; a beautiful young mother rocking her child in her arms; the father reading in his armchair close by.

All turned and looked at the intruder in polite surprise. He stammered out his story, and was stared at suspiciously, as if he was an escaped lunatic. It was indignantly denied that anything tragic had taken place. He must have a brain fever or be subject to horrible illusions. He was made almost to doubt his eyes and to apologize for his intrusion. He was graciously asked to shelter himself from the storm; and he staid, and fell under the spell of one of the beautiful women, and—but there ended this initial chapter of a story that, like its author's brilliant life, broke off abruptly, leaving its sequel to be guessed.

MARY E. BRYAN.

Senator Wolcott. NEW YORK, May 23.—The marriage of United States Senator Wolcott, of Colorado, is an event to cause his friends some surprise. He had been long regarded as a confirmed bachelor, as also his brother, the wealthy Colorado banker and miner, has been. A good deal has been written about the romantic and, in some respects, dramatic career of Wolcott, and much of it must have surprised him when he read it.

Although both he and his brother have known what roughing it means, even to the last extremity of necessity, yet the family is one in which culture and refinement prevailed, and upon his mother's side there was wealth. His maternal grandfather, Jonathan Pope, was one of the first to develop cotton manufacturing in this country, and amassed a fortune in the business. He has lived for many years in Norwich, Conn. An uncle, L. W. Carroll, is one of the wealthiest and best known business men of eastern Connecticut. His father was a splendid specimen of what New England orthodox sometimes does for its adherents, and was for many years one of the powers in the Congregational pulpits of this country. He had a very large family. The sons were all, like the father, veritable Sauls; superb in their physical development and of the fair haired, fine complexioned type that is associated with the Saxons. The sons are handsome men; the daughters beautiful women of statuesque mold.

Wolcott's father sent him to Yale college, in the class that was graduated in 1870, but he did not graduate. He only staid a year, but while he was there he was a lively youth. The faculty looked at him with dubious eyes, but his classmates made him a hero. It was said that at one examination, the class being in despair over the Euclid papers, fearing that they would be difficult, Wolcott undertook to get his classmates out of the difficulty, and, in ways known best to himself, managed to get a sly peep at the examination papers before they were handed to the class. Having done so he passed the word along, and so it happened that the class did an unprecedented thing—it passed a perfect examination; so perfect that the faculty became suspicious, investigated and discovered, and compelled the students to submit to another examination. From this Wolcott escaped, as he had by that time left the college.

He was the nerviest and coolest better in all the college, maintaining the honor of his colors with fearlessness, even when his judgment was against the bet; and this is a trait that is said to have afterwards been developed in the wilds of Colorado and to have given him great favor among the rough miners.

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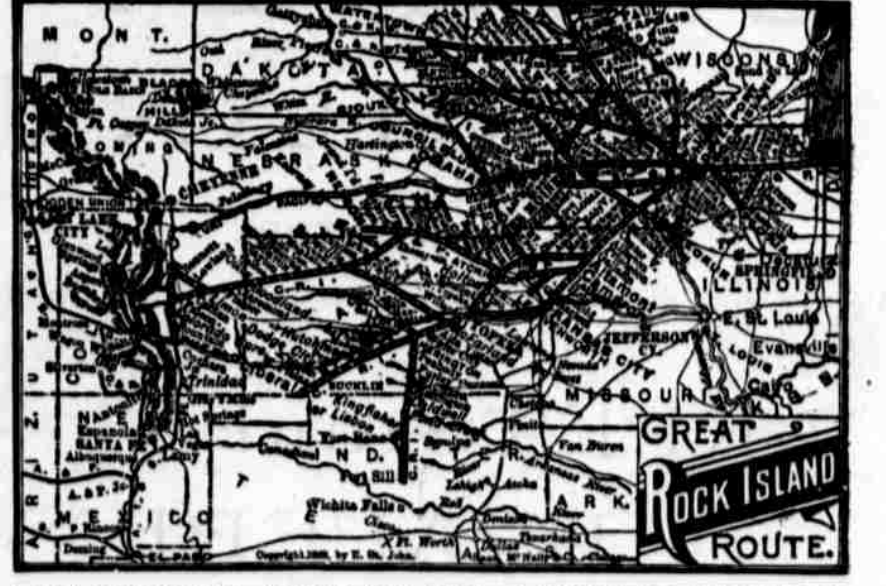
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A MAN

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