

## TO YATES SNOWDEN

James Henry Rice, Jr.

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To the Editor of The State:

There is less excuse for exaggeration in speaking of Yates Snowden than of any man I knew. It would be ill service to picture him other than he was. When I first went to Berkeley county, in the early '80s, he ran a weekly newspaper at Moncks Corner, about which I know nothing, though its files would doubtless show gleams of his genius. Born in Charleston, he was, to all intents and purposes, a citizen of Upper St. John's parish, Berkeley.

Mr. Mazyck Porcher, his "Carolina Bourbon," I knew well and shared his hospitality; from which I know how true to life was the picture Yates drew in his poem, which will last as long as South Carolina does, not unlikely longer. Henry E. Ravenel wrote me, objecting to certain details in his kinsman's life, but these were trivial, at best, in no way affecting the truth of the portrayal.

Mexico plantation and its distinguished overlord owe immortality to the genius of Yates Snowden. It would be impossible to reconstruct them today, for nothing remains of the splendor of days gone by, not even "the topless towers of Iliion" to mark where Priam ruled and Hector met his death at the hand of Achilles. To go back no farther than 30 years, Berkeley county has passed all familiar road signs; the wisest of travelers would not suspect the beauty, charm and gentleness, struggling then against onrushing barbarism. Fifty years ago, many of the Paladins walked the earth and dispensed a hospitality, less lavish, it is true, than of old, but just as cordial. The men and women, who gave the region tone and standing, were there, with the exception of those who had laid down their burdens on the battlefield, or in the years since.

No part of the state was richer in history, or more prolific in sending forth great figures into state and national life, standing forth among whom was William Moultrie. The history of the Huguenot settlers on Santee, who, starting with nothing, had cleared a vast swamp and laid the foundation of fortunes, many of which exist today, is an epic of world life.

The great botanists, Thomas Walter, Henry W. Ravenel and Francis Pierre Porcher, all of this region, made South Carolina known to the ends of the earth, known where the political leaders of the state were never heard of.

Born of a patriotic father and a sainted mother, linked by blood with the best in Charleston and in the region round about, Yates Snowden breathed nobility from his cradle. From his parents and from his associations he imbibed a love of the state that never left him. He had faith in South Carolina, even in the darkest days, and implicitly believed that the state would be true to its destiny, after the clouds had rolled away.

He entered the service of The News and Courier when the staff was a brilliant one. F. W. Dawson was editor; J. C. Hemphill, assistant editor; Carlyle McKinley wrote the leaders; old man Logan (he called it Log-gin), whom I loved and every politician in the state hated with venom, because he flayed them in his headlines, did telegraph, and Yates was country editor. Forty-odd years ago I dropped in at night often, and we had a clack. Business was suspended for the time, unless something away out of the ordinary was on hand.

All in all, the staff contained a rare group of men. It was Mayor W. A. Courtenay who brought out "The Carolina Bourbon," sold for some worthy cause. Yates sent me a

copy, inscribed: "From Your Friend and Fellow Galley-Slave at Night." I have it yet, though he sent me another which is at Red Hill library, along with memorials of "Fighting Dick" Anderson and his brother, Dr. William Wallace Anderson.

The little episode, called "The Dirge in the Pines," wherein he described Mr. William Mazyck Porcher, "The Carolina Bourbon," tolling the bell at the death of Jefferson Davis, tolling while alone in the pine forest, wrapped in his memories, is an idyll.

Yates was never at home anywhere but in Charleston or in the coast region. When I met him there at intervals, he was a new man, or, rather, the old Yates, whom we all knew and loved, with whom we forgathered. In Columbia, he was altogether different. To make this intelligible, I would have to reveal Charleston's life, thirty to forty years ago, not only unknown to the state at large, but equally unknown to present day Charlestonians; for Charleston today is no more like the Charleston of 40 years ago than London is like Constantinople, or New York like New Orleans. There is not a familiar sign of the past, save, now and then, some lingerer on the scene shyly comes up.

The move to Columbia was good for the university, no doubt, and had a benign effect on current manners. Yates could have acquitted himself with honor and distinction in a much larger field; but it tore him loose from his habitat; and I know that certain aspects of the situation jarred on him. He was loyal to the university, especially loyal to the library, which he helped to improve.

There was one gain to the public by his removal. He became known for the first time, and men and women sought him for help, always getting it—getting more than they dreamed of getting. He asked nothing in return, not even acknowledgment. His books and papers were always at the disposal of students and friends. Students of history and literary workers have lost a priceless friend.

In his addresses and in his contributions to the press, Yates did himself no great credit, considering his vast range, genius and accumulation. The explanation lies in the fact, brought out long ago, that poets write prose with the left hand; and Yates was essentially a poet. There was a stiffness about his other efforts, which showed that the task was more or less irksome.

To know the real Yates, you had to get him cornered at home with a congenial companion. Then his talents sparkled; his conversation rippled like a brook, or flowed on like a great river at times. He was inspired, and the man who heard him was a fortunate individual.

He could not be dull, if he tried. The professor, the newspaper writer, the lecturer had vanished. Instead, there arose a compelling genius, racy, delightful, bubbling with wit, or emitting sly humor.

One memorable night I went down to see him. He came to the door, bareheaded, though a keen wind was blowing, caught my hand, and said abruptly: "I can give you ten minutes—not a minute more. I'm worked to death!"

I went in; he began talking, handing a cigar first; and I watched the clock. When ten minutes expired, I rose to go. He sprang at me, caught both shoulders and pushed me back in the chair. I reminded him that ten minutes marked the limit. Several times, after that, I tried to go, and was always shoved back into the chair. Finally at a quarter to four in the morning, I got out, he following me to the door and shouting: "Get right out! You have taken

up my whole night!" The expression on his face was so whimsical, I had to laugh. I feel certain he worked right on to daylight, and, after a hasty breakfast, met his classes, without a suspicion on a student's mind that he had "made a night of it."

My cousin, Thomas Carew, and Yates were chums, about the same age, with similar tastes and habits. Poor Tom died from tuberculosis and Yates took it hard. His account of it to me was pathetic in the extreme. He broke down while telling it.

One day I met Yates, when he seemed much disturbed. The reason was that two coeds had just passed him and waved at him, yelling out: "Hello!" As Josh Billings used to say, that was "2 mutch" for him.

"I would not trust myself to say what I think," he said; and I knew what he thought when two female ruffians had made such an exhibition of themselves.

His library should be kept intact, whether it remain at home or is acquired by some institution. The value of it would be multiplied by keeping it entire. Like a diamond, it would lose value in the cutting.

In his hands it was a benefaction to those who needed it. Few men got so much out of a library as he did out of his. Whatever else happens, this fact will remain, and much of the library can never be lost, for it has been incorporated in the published works of others.

With the modern historian, Yates had no sympathy; for that individual dissects a man, takes his letters, speeches, public and private acts, and passes on the man, forgetful of the great fact, brought out by the subtlest of English thinkers, Coleridge, who showed that not what a man said or what he did was his measure, but what he was. Overlooking this main fact, the modern historian's appraisal is worthless.

Yates grew up among big men, knew the story of the great men of the past, and could understand why they were great. The only way to understand such men is to live in the same atmosphere. The charm of Plutarch and of Macaulay, and of Sir Walter Scott lies in their first hand knowledge of distinguished men and women. A man who had seen no animal bigger than a mouse or a rabbit would be a poor judge of horses.

Finally then, with no exaggeration at all, Yates Snowden, born in the purple of gentility and brought up in a clean moral atmosphere, had a fine start. To his honor, it can be said with truth that when he laid down his burden at the noble age of 75, he had done nothing to shame his birth, or that was unbecoming the atmosphere of his mother's home.

That is a fine heritage to bequeath to his fellow countrymen.

JAMES HENRY RICE, JR.

From Across  
the  
Editor's DeskBY S. L. LATIMER  
Editor of The State

The late Yates Snowden, first a newspaper man, but for the better part of his life head of the history department at the University of South Carolina, was a picturesque figure, both in appearance and conduct.

I can see him now, a dark cape thrown over his shoulders, his

wing collar, his scholarly hair and his mustache, a distinguished white. He thought nothing of leaving his home on Sumter street and strolling to the postoffice at 1 or 2 a.m. to mail a letter or to drop into an all-night restaurant for a cup of coffee, or to speak to the late-workers at the office of The State. The light in his study burned to the wee sma' hours. Consequently he preferred to lie in bed when morning came. He positively refused to meet early classes.

Once, in revising the academic schedules, it was proposed by University authorities that Professor Snowden make an eight o'clock lecture.

"Eight o'clock?" he asked in astonishment.

"Eight o'clock? Why that would get me up before daylight," adding the borrowed expression that he had seen the sun rise only once in his life, "and it was a horrible sight."

The professor didn't like coeds as coeds. He liked girls but not as Carolina students. He thought they had no place in a man's school. And he openly let it be known. Often he pointed out their presence (they were few in those days) in the classroom, saying they had no business there. But even the girls enjoyed what he said.

The professor had a wonderful library but he was too lenient in letting out his volumes. On one occasion so many books were absent from their rightful places on his shelves that he put an advertisement in The State, reading like this:

"Yates Snowden, At Home, 803 Sumter Street, 4 to 6 o'clock, Friday afternoon. Admission: The return of one book borrowed from me." And as a postscript:

"Positively No Books Lent During the Hours of the Reception!"

A student from Edgefield, now a resident of Columbia—Elliott Simkins—asked Professor Snowden in Second History if it was all right to study on Sunday for an examination. Quick as a flash, Professor Snowden replied: "Mr. Simkins, the Bible says it is all right to pull a jackass out of a ditch on Sunday; I see no reason why a jackass shouldn't pull himself out."

There are many good stories that could be told of Professor Snowden. He was that kind of a person. He was several times voted the most popular professor on the campus, and was held in the highest esteem by students and faculty, but let no one think he was an easy taskmaster, for he was not. He knew history—he had a rich

personal storehouse of knowledge about South Carolina—and he was devoutly devoted to the principles and tradition of his state. And he exacted of his students that they know what had been taught in the course.

Professor and Mrs. Snowden had no children. One Sunday afternoon he came to The State office, in company with his close friend, the late lamented Dr. W. W. Ball.

It seems that a relative with a small child had arrived, and the mother wanted a cereal for the little one—cream of wheat, I think it was. So Professor Snowden, who never owned an automobile, and Doctor Ball, who never drove one, set out in the latter's car, with chauffeur, to try to find the needed food.

In those days a store open on Sunday was a rarity. Doctor Ball thought someone in the news room of The State might know a side-street emporium that might be doing business. The two invited me to go with them in search of the cereal. Finally, after riding around many blocks, we found a small place in operation in a rather questionable part of the city. I offered to go in, but Professor Snowden, his cape over his shoulders and his head high, insisted that he do so. Strange to say, the grocer had the desired item in stock, so the quest ended happily.

Later that afternoon the police visited the store and charged the owner with selling liquor. I have often thought how silly Professor Snowden's "excuse" would have sounded had the raid of the Blind Tiger come while he was in the joint and he had explained his presence by saying he was looking for baby food! It was no secret that the professor liked to indulge discreetly.

I think modern education has lost something in the passing of beloved and picturesque characters such as Dr. Yates Snowden.

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