



AUTHOR'S BIRTHPLACE, GEORGETOWN, DELAWARE

George Alfred Townsend was born at Georgetown, Delaware, on January 30, 1841. He was the son of Rev. Stephen Townsend, an itinerant Methodist minister and part-time carpenter. Townsend's early family life was one of relative poverty - due primarily to his father's occupation. A minister's income was based on the wealth and support of his congregations, and most of Rev. Townsends congregations were poorer ones. This early poverty was perhaps the single most important factor contributing towards George Alfred's success.

In 1851, Rev. Townsend was transferred to a charge in Newark, Del. Shortly after his arrival, George Alfred was enrolled in the Newark Academy. In 1856, his father was transferred again, this time to Philadelphia, where Townsend finished his formal education in 1860. He had apparently been drawn to writing early in life, and during his youth he became known for his quick thought and writing speed. Following his graduation, Townsend was offered a position with a Philadelphia newspaper. In 1862 - George Alfred (who was better known by his pen name - Gath) was sent to the battlegrounds in Virginia as a "special correspondent" for the New York Herald. There he covered several famous battles, informing northern readers of the war's progress. It was as a pioneer in this type of journalism that Townsend achieved his first success and fame. For two years he travelled around Europe, lecturing and writing about the war. Upon his return, Townsend received national attention for his coverage of the Lincoln assassination and the capture of John Wilkes Booth. In 1867 he established a residence in Washington, spending the next several years rotating between his homes in New York and the capitol. During this period he travelled extensively, writing and lecturing. He was employed by almost every metropolitan newspaper in the country, dictating an average of two columns a day for over forty years. Largely forgotten by modern historians, Townsend earned and kept his reputation as "the great special correspondent" of his time, often compared to Lowell Thomas in stature.

Townsend had become interested in literature in its purer forms early in life. During his later years, he attempted to transform himself from journalist to author. Although he was less successful in this new field, Townsend wrote several widely-read novels and books of poetry. It is for this phase of his career that George Alfred Townsend is best-remembered today. His novel, THE ENTAILED HAT (published in 1884), remains a steady seller in local bookstores. Townsend's deep love for his native region is well illustrated in this fascinating tale of life and events on the Shore in the early 19th century. As an author, George Alfred Townsend brought the breath of life to such legendary personages as Patty Cannon and the notorious slave runner, Joe Johnson. His early familiarity with the people and places of Delmarva, coupled with a keen sense of history, provided Townsend with the subject material for a great deal of his writings.

During his long and eventful career, George Alfred Townsend achieved a great deal of fame and success. He counted among his personal friends many leading figures of the day. The people of Georgetown, the place of his birth, can take particular pride in this colorful native son. A man of many talents, George Alfred Townsend left a legacy which should be highly treasured by all Delmarvans.

George Alfred Townsend died on April 15, 1914. His estate in the Maryland mountains (known as Gathland), is maintained by the State of Maryland as a state park.