

**ALDERSON'S FAMOUS AUTHOR:
MRS. ALEX. MCVEIGH MILLER**

By Kathleen Kennedy

Mrs. Alex. McVeigh Miller was the Danielle Steele of her age. Starting in the late 1800's, Miller wrote dime novels that thrilled a generation of readers with their tales of intrigue and love. Featuring guileless young maidens, chivalrous gentlemen, dastardly villains and ironic twists of fate, all but one of her eighty novels ended happily with the hero and heroine united in love. Mrs. Miller called her works "sensational" stories because of their fantastic plots. As improbable as her tales were, however, the author's own life was every bit as sensational. Her story is one of poverty followed by wealth and fame, culminating with, as she herself said, "so many unhappy endings."

Born on April 30, 1850, at Hanover Junction (now Doswell), Virginia, Miller was christened Mittie Frances Clarke Point, a name that honored her mother's two best friends. A precocious child, Mittie showed literary talent early in life. She received her initial education at home where knowledge was highly valued, and subsequently at a school run by her Aunt Margaret in Portsmouth, Virginia. But with the eruption of the Civil War in 1861, her studies ceased.

The war left no time for learning philosophy and literature. Daily survival required the combined efforts of every member of Mittie's family, then living in Richmond. In a city plundered by hungry Confederate soldiers and besieged by attacking Union troops, just gathering food was a challenge. Potatoes, black-eyed peas and cabbage were usually available, but on one occasion, after another band of starving soldiers raided their larder, the family had nothing left but some flour, which they made into biscuits and ate thankfully.

When the war ended, life in Richmond slowly returned to normal and Mittie resumed her education at the Richmond Female Institute (later known as Richmond Woman's College). A bright and dedicated student, her first love was poetry, especially that of Byron and Tennyson. She wrote several poems that were well received by her teachers and classmates during this time, including a graduation essay in poetic form titled, *Drifted Fancies*. The poem was written in what she described as a "deadly serious vein . . . with twenty-eight elaborately-rhymed stanzas of musings on life, death and nature." Though these subjects seem weighty for an eighteen-year-old's pen, the piece was written with Mittie's usual flair: