The Letter That Came

BY WILLIAM WENDHAM.

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"Joseph Major," said the little man in the gray serge suit, to the clerk inside the postoffice window, who, taking a second glance of kindly inquisitiveness at the gentle face outside, handed him several letters.

The litle man bustled away handling over the letters until one of them caused him to stop in his steps. It was a seared and yellow envelope, bearing in its whole appearance, in the cramped handwriting and in the stamp up in the corner, a look of years, as if it had dropped, meteor-like, from the far-away past.

The man stood, turning it over in his hand, regardless of those passing and repassing him, many of whom turned curious glances toward him. On his face expressions of amazement, pleasure, sadness and consternation succeeded each other with a kaleidoscopic rapidity. A moment afterward he walked away from the postoffice, and, crossing the street, to a small triangle of grass adorned with shrubbery and seats and decorously named a park, he seated himself in a retired spot, and with trembling fingers and fast-going breath, opened the envelope.

As he glanced at the first lines his face grew white and drawn and he stared at the contents as if he were looking at a ghost. He leaned back and his hand sought his forehead as if seeking to brush away cobwebs from his brain. This was what the letter was, written in an unformed and girlish hand:

Cairoville, O., April 9, 1863.

Dear Joseph:—I cannot tell you how bad I felt when I came home and found that you had gone to the war and I had not seen you to say even one word to you before you went. But I found your letter waiting for me and explaining it all, and that was something, though I don't see why you should have started before the other ones. Of course you did right to enlist and I am proud of you for it.

But, oh! Joseph, when I think that I may never see you again; that at any moment, even now you may be wounded and suffering, and I am here helpless, it seems as if I cannot bear it. And losing poor mamma, too, just at this time I feel as if I had no one to turn to but you, and you are hundreds of miles away. As you know, mamma died and they brought her home and laid her to rest in the little cemetery on the hill. Of course, Joseph, you can rely upon me. You need never have doubted it, but everything was so uncertain while mamma was ill and I felt that my first duty was to her and I could not say anything more definite then; but now that she is gone I belong wholly to you.

When shall I see you again, and when will these terrible troubles end? When I read of the dreadful battles and, particularly when I read the long lists of dead, wounded and missing my heart beats so that it seems that it would burst.

Good-bye, my dear Joseph, and may God protect and keep you from harm.

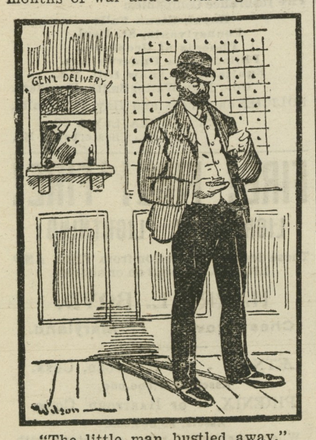
Your loving sweetheart,
MARY PRESTON.

His eyes lingered over the signature. All those gentle, loving words he had so longed to hear and never had they reached him during all the weary years. The words rang in his ears. His heart beat them out in its pulsations, and his eyes saw them wherever he looked. The bitterness and sadness of it all filled his heart with aching, and seemed to crush his very soul. He sat gazing at the green grass, the trees, the singing birds and the children playing about him, but he saw none of these—only the tragedy of his life!

Thirty years before he reflected and saw himself a boy, just entering manhood, hard at work on the farm with a step-father who had little use for him except as a working machine, with no mother, sister or close kin to look to in those years of longing for companionship; but with one friend—the sweet, black-eyed girl, to whom his sensitive nature had turned for sympathy.

Again he heard the roll of the drums and felt the thrills that went through him when, as a boy, he heard of the country's danger and the call for men and yet more men. Again he drilled as a raw recruit and marched away to the war, the one pang at his heart being that "The girl he left behind him" was not there to listen to his last good-bye. She had gone with her mother in search by the latter for relief from the dread disease which had blighted her life and in the hurrying changes from one place to another,he did not know where to address her. And so he had left a letter for her at her home, to which she was soon to return.

He recalled the weary weeks and months of war and of waiting for the



"The little man bustled away."

letter which had never come; the horror of battles, the homesickness and privation; the gradual growth of the idea that his sweetheart had proved faithless! Sensitive and proud as he had ever been, his boyish pride had forbidden him to write her again. Instead he had hoped that each battle and each prison would end his unhappy life, and yet, court danger as he had, fate had insisted on sparing him—and for what? For the successful life he had lived as a cattle raiser on the western plains? What had business success been to him, who had lost from his life the kernel of sweetness and had left the husks only?

For thirty years the letter had waited. He looked at it resentfully and then, as if asking where and when and how, and why, had this letter, which had meant so much to him, gone astray for thirty weary years, while so many letters of mere business importance had reached him with such aggravating promptness. To come at last to his hands, only to rack him with sufferings, misgivings and regrets for the years that had gone. He sat a long time in that apathy which follows acute mental suffering, with the yellow, old letter in his hand. The June sun reached its zenith and was midway down the western sky before he came back from the past to live again in the present. Gradually his face assumed an expression of—at first comprehension, then of interest and finally of resolution. He seemed to be then considering something very earnestly. Finally he took the yellow,



"'Oh, Joseph!' was all she could say."

old letter and put it in his safest inside pocket, rose from the seat and looked at the declining sun, brushed the dust from his hat with his handkerchief and buttoned up his coat. He then walked quietly, but resolutely toward the railway depot.

"What's the fare to Cairoville?" asked a litle man in a gray serge suit at the window in the railway depot.

"Eight seventy-five," replied the man behind the window; and then looking out at the buyer he added.

"Going away, Mr. Major?"

"Yes, haven't been anywhere since I settled her ten years ago. Used to live in Cairoville when I was a boy, so I thought I would go over and look at the place.

* * * * *

The next afternoon Joseph Major walked up the gravel path to the old Preston home in Cairoville. His heart thumped violently against his ribs.

"Yes, Miss Preston is at home," said the maid. He waited for her impatiently, noting meanwhile the many changes the years had wrought in the familiar room and the things left unchanged.

She came at last, all prepared to be formal to a stranger. When she saw him as he rose from his chair, with the suffering and longing of the years written on his face, when she realized it was him, that he had not, after all been among "the missing," such a look of gladness came into her face that it seemed as if it were illumined and the years seemed to roll from her.

"Oh, Joseph," was all she could say as she went toward him with both hands outstretched to him. But it was enough. And in their hearts was the springtime of youth, although upon their brows was the frost of the autumn.

Oldest Town in Illinois.

The assertion is made by Pekin, Jacksonville, and other papers that, since Kaskaskia vanished from the map, the oldest town in Illinois is Mackinaw, in Tazewell county, which was founded in 1823, and contained a courthouse as early as 1825. Lewistown, although that city's papers have not made denial of the Mackinaw story, is one year older than the former Tazewell county capital, if writers of Fulton county history have not erred, and the first courthouse there was built in 1823. Mackinaw must wait until Lewistown has followed Kaskaskia to oblivion before claiming position on the top shelf in the state cabinet of antiquities.—Canton, Ill., Register.

A Honeymoon Financier.

Judge Edwards of Lee county, who has married over a hundred couples since he has been ordinary, performed the ceremony recently for a runaway couple seated in a buggy in the public road.

The ceremony over, the groom fumbled in his pockets and fished up 36 cents.

"Jedge," he said, "this here's all the money I got in the roun' worl'. Ef you're a-mind to take it, you kin; but I'll say straightfor'ards that I'd done sot it aside fer the honeymoon expenses!'"—Atlanta Constitution.

Humanity Lacks Originality.

Says a Philadelphia physician: The utter lack of originality in the human mind vexes me. Even the insane are not original in their delusions and manias, but they can be divided into classes, and each class has its one little uniform and unvarying set of aberrations. The insane can not be other than imitative and commonplace."

Patrick on the Witness Stand

Proves Difficult Subject for Cross-Examination.

Pat was on the witness stand sorely against his will. He was more than an unwilling witness; he was sullenly cross and uncommunicative. His "dandher wuz riz" when the brutally offensive lawyer on the other side had sought to belittle him as an honest wage-earner.

"What's your business?" was asked with a half-sneer that implied that the answer would reflect on Pat's value as an intelligent witness.

"I'm a hod-carrier," was the straightforward reply.

"It's an elevating business, isn't it?"

"It's as elevatin' as sindin' up the hangman's materials; and ye've carried him some, I believe."

The examination was prosecuted more warily after this retort, the lawyer, however, ever on the alert for an opening through which to retrieve himself. It offered when Pat incautiously or innocently replied to some question that "it would be a miracle" if things were otherwise.

"Ha! You say 'twould be a miracle. Can you define a miracle?"

"Not by rule o' thumb. I never practiced 'em."

Like many another brow-beater who feels himself being worsted, the legal casuist lost control of himself at this reply and pitched head on.

"You are a hod-carrier, you say?"

"I swore it."

"You swore to a miracle, too, sir."

"Yer honor looks as if ye were goin' to swear at it."

"Never mind me——"

"Och, sorrow on the heed I'd ever be given ye if ye weren't forcin' yerself on me."

"Come, come! No more of this quibbling. You say you cannot define a miracle. Suppose a man fell from the fourth story of a building on which you were working and escaped without hurt; what would you call that?"

"I'd call it a lawyer's story, yer honor."

"Bother the story. Suppose you knew for yourself that that man actually fell that distance seven times in so many days in a week and was never hurt. What would you call it then?"

"Thin I'd call it Sabbath-breaking or wan of the days," replied Pat, according to the New York Times, "and, be gob, by that time, too, I'd call it a habit the man had."

Were Never Defeated

Victorious Generals Who Conducted Campaigns Without Reverses.

It is curious and interesting in reading the lives of great military commanders to observe among the large number of generals who have held independent commands how few have careers of uninterrupted success. A man who can go through a campaign and fight many battles and never suffer a reverse must, indeed, be a commander of the first order.

The Duke of Alva, one of the most eminent soldiers of the sixteenth century, never, throughout his long and eventful career, lost a battle. The archbishop of Cologne was struck by his efforts to avoid a conflict, having on one occasion urged him to engage the Dutch. "The object of a general," replied Alva, "is not to fight, but to conquer; he fights enough who obtains the victory."

Oliver Cromwell, throughout his military career, never lost a battle, though he very nearly sustained a reverse at Dunbar.

The Duke of Marlborough affords an excellent example of a successful soldier. He combined all the qualities necessary for a great commander, and although he fought several battles against the most experienced generals in Europe, he was never once defeated.

The famous Russian general, Suwaroff, was another commander destined never to suffer defeat. He gained several victories against the Turks and against the Poles, and in Italy he was opposed by Moreau. Being completely outnumbered, he effected a brilliant retreat over the mountains of Switzerland, through Germany, into Russia. He was held in great respect by his soldiers, and although he showed himself to be an exceedingly able tactician, he used to say that the whole of his system was comprised in the words, "Advance and strike."

The Duke of Wellington, throughout his brilliant campaigns, both in India and in the Peninsula, has preserved to himself a remarkable record of uninterrupted successes from the first battle in which he was vested with supreme command thrcughout the Peninsular war, in which he defeated the ablest of Napoleon's marshals, until the eventful day of Waterloo, when he defeated the greatest soldier of modern times.

Don't bounce the baby when he cries. Look for the pin.

Merely the Horse Reporter.

The return of Pere Hyacinth to Rome and his preaching to great Protestant congregations recall an unpublished episode of his visit to San Francisco years ago. He then spoke only French, and a local journal sent to interview him Piercy Wilson, an eccentric Englishman, who had been bred for the church, but who had made a specialty of the theaters and turf.

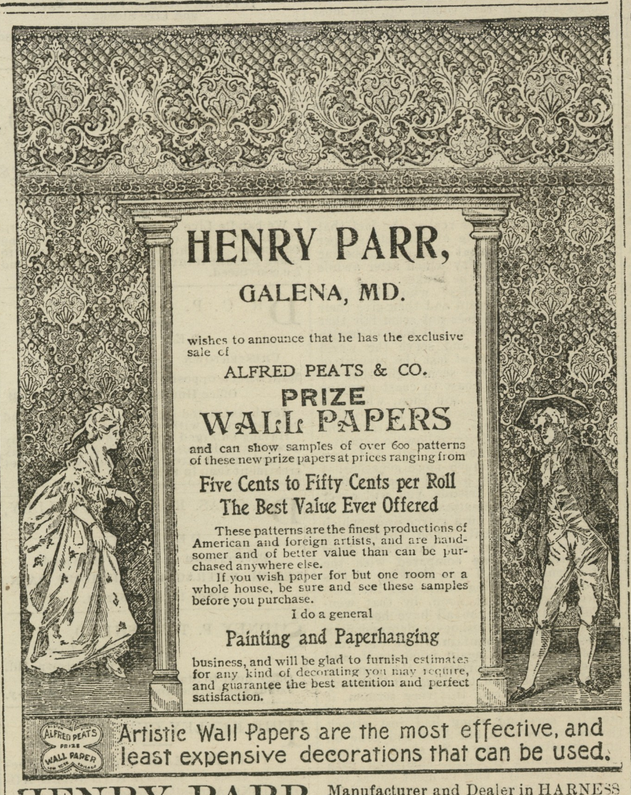
After a general talk on his visit and his impressions of California the conversation shifted to religious topics. The intimate familiarity of the reporter with theological questions seemed to amaze Pere Hyacinthe, and when the interviewer rose to go, he said, with the puzzled look still on his face:

"Pardon me, but you have shown such astonishing familiarity with questions that only a theologian usually understands that I should like to know with what special department of your newspaper you are connected?"

"Oh," said old Wilson, with dry humor, "I'm the horse reporter!"

Millions Live on the Ocean.

The population of the ocean is estimated at 3,000,000. That is to say, the number of sailors and others whose business is on the high seas equals the inhabitants of the thirteen original colonies. Last year more than one-sixth of this ocean population, or to be more exact, 550,000, officers and men, of 4,343 vessels, entered the port of New York.



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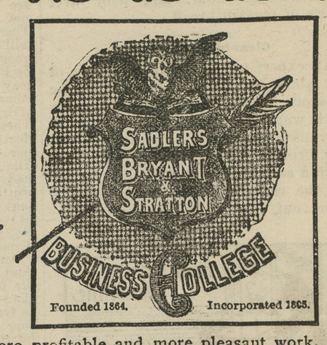
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