WHITE WILLIAM ALLEN

IN OUR TOWN

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White W.

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Содержание

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I
Scribes and Pharisees

Ours is a little town in that part of the country called the West by those who live east of the Alleghanies, and referred to lovingly as "back East" by those who dwell west of the Rockies. It is a country town where, as the song goes, "you know everybody and they all know you," and the country newspaper office is the social clearing-house.

When a man has published a paper in a country community for many years, he knows his town and its people, their strength and their weakness, their joys and their sorrows, their failings and their prosperity—or if he does not know these things, he is on the road to failure, for this knowledge must be the spirit of his paper. The country editor and his reporters sooner or later pass upon everything that interests their town.

In our little newspaper office we are all reporters, and we know many intimate things about our people that we do not print. We know, for instance, which wives will not let their husbands endorse other men's notes at the banks. We know about the row the Baptists are having to get rid of the bass singer in their choir, who has sung at funerals for thirty years, until it has reached a point where all good Baptists dread death on account of his lugubrious profundo. Perhaps we should take this tragedy to heart, but we know that the Methodists are having the same trouble with their soprano, who "flats"—and has flatted for ten years, and is too proud to quit the choir "under fire" as she calls it; and we remember what a time the Congregationalists had getting rid of their tenor. So that choir troubles are to us only a part of the grist that keeps the mill going.

As the merest incident of the daily grind, it came to the office that the bank cashier, whose retirement we announced with half a column of regret, was caught $3500 short, after twenty years of faithful service, and that his wife sold the homestead to make his shortage good. We know the week that the widower sets out, and we hear with remarkable accuracy just when he has been refused by this particular widow or that, and, when he begins on a school-teacher, the whole office has candy and cigar and mince pie bets on the result, with the odds on the widower five to one. We know the woman who is always sent for when a baby comes to town, and who has laid more good people of the community in their shrouds than all the undertakers. We know the politician who gets five dollars a day for his "services" at the polls, the man who takes three dollars and the man who will work for the good of the cause in the precious hope of a blessed reward at some future county convention. To know these things is not a matter of pride; it is not a source of annoyance or shame; it is part of the business.

Though our loathed but esteemed contemporary, the *Statesman*, speaks of our town as "this city," and calls the marshal "chief of police," we are none the less a country town. Like hundreds of its kind, our little daily newspaper is equipped with typesetting machines and is printed from a web perfecting press, yet it is only a country newspaper, and knowing this we refuse to put on city airs. Of course we print the afternoon Associated Press report on the first page, under formal heads and with some pretence of dignity, but that first page is the parlour of the paper, as it is of most of its contemporaries, and in the other pages they and we go around in our shirt sleeves, calling people by their first names; teasing the boys and girls good-naturedly; tickling the pompous members of the village family with straws from time to time, and letting out the family secrets of the community without much regard for the feelings of the supercilious.

Nine or ten thousand people in our town go to bed on this kind of mental pabulum, as do country-town dwellers all over the United States, and although we do not claim that it is helpful, we do contend that it does not hurt them. Certainly by poking mild fun at the shams—the town pharisees—we make it more difficult to maintain the class lines which the pretenders would establish. Possibly by printing the news of everything that happens, suppressing nothing "on account of the respectability of the parties concerned," we may prevent some evil-doers from going on with their plans, but this is mere conjecture, and we do not set it down to our credit. What we maintain is that in printing our little country dailies, we, the scribes, from one end of the world to the other, get more than our share of fun out of life as we go along, and pass as much of it on to our neighbours as we can spare.

Suppressing nothing "on account of the respectability of the parties concerned"

Because we live in country towns, where the only car-gongs we hear are on the baker's waggon, and where the horses in the fire department work on the streets, is no reason why city dwellers should assume that we are natives. We have no dialect worth recording—save that some of us Westerners burr our "r's" a little or drop an occasional final "g." But you will find that all the things advertised in the backs of the magazines are in our houses, and that the young men in our towns walking home at midnight, with their coats over their arms, whistle the same popular airs that lovelorn boys are whistling in New York, Portland, San Francisco or New Orleans that same fine evening. Our girls are those pretty, reliant, well-dressed young women whom you see at the summer resorts from Coronado Beach to Buzzard's Bay. In the fall and winter these girls fill the colleges of the East and the State universities of the West. Those wholesome, frank, good-natured people whom you met last winter at the Grand Cañons and who told you of the funny performance of "Uncle Tom's Cabin" in Yiddish at the People's Theatre on the East Side in New York, and insisted that you see the totem pole in Seattle; and then take a cottage for a month at Catalina Island; who gave you the tip about Abson's quaint little beefsteak chop-house up an alley in Chicago, who told you of Mrs. O'Hagan's second-hand furniture shop in Charleston, where you can get real colonial stuff dirt cheap—those people are our leading citizens, who run the bank or the dry-goods store or the flour-mill. At our annual arts and crafts show we have on exhibition loot from the four corners of the earth, and the club woman who has not heard it whispered around in our art circles that Mr. Sargent is painting too many portraits lately, and that a certain long-legged model whose face is familiar in the weekly magazines is no better than she should be—a club woman in our town who does not know of these things is out of caste in clubdom, and women say of her that she is giving too much time to her church.

We take all the beautiful garden magazines, and our terra-cotta works are turning out creditable vases—which we pronounce "vahzes," you may be sure—for formal gardens. And though we men for the most part run our own lawnmowers, and personally look after the work of the college boy who takes care of the horse and the cow for his room, still there are a few of us proud and haughty creatures who have automobiles, and go snorting around the country scaring horses and tooting terror

into the herds by the roadside. But the bright young reporters on our papers do not let an automobile come to town without printing an item stating its make and its cost, and whether or not it is a new one or a second-hand one, and what speed it can make. At the flower parade in our own little town last October there were ten automobiles in line, decked with paper flowers and laden with pretty girls in lawns and dimities and linens—though as a matter of fact most of the linens were only "Indian head." And our particular little country paper printed an item to the effect that the real social line of cleavage in the town lies not between the cut-glass set and the devotees of hand-painted china, but between the real nobility who wear genuine linen and the base imitations who wear Indian head.

In some towns an item like that would make people mad, but we have our people trained to stand a good deal. They know that it costs them five cents a line for cards of thanks and resolutions of respect, so they never bring them in. They know that our paper never permits "one who was there" to report social functions, so that dear old correspondent has resigned; and because we have insisted for years on making an item about the first tomatoes that are served in spring at any dinner or reception, together with the cost per pound of the tomatoes, the town has become used to our attitude and does not buzz with indignation when we poke a risible finger at the homemade costumes of the Plymouth Daughters when they present "The Mikado" to pay for the new pipe-organ. Indeed, so used is the town to our ways that when there was great talk last winter about Mrs. Frelingheysen for serving fresh strawberries over the ice cream at her luncheon in February, just after her husband had gone through bankruptcy, she called up Miss Larrabee, our society editor, on the telephone and asked her to make a little item saying that the strawberries served by Mrs. Frelingheysen at her luncheon were not fresh, but merely sun dried. This we did gladly and printed her recipe. So used is this town to our school teachers resigning to get married that when one resigns for any other reason we make it a point to announce in the paper that it is not for the usual reason, and tell our readers exactly what the young woman is going to do.

So, gradually, without our intending to establish it, a family vernacular has grown up in the paper which our people understand, but which—like all other family vernaculars—is Greek to those outside the circle. Thus we say:

"Bill Parker is making his eighth biennial distribution of cigars to-day for a boy."

City papers would print it:

"Born to Mr. and Mrs. W. H. Parker, a baby boy."

Again we print this item:

"Mrs. Merriman is getting ready to lend her fern to the Nortons, June 15."

That doesn't mean anything, unless you happen to know that Mrs. Merriman has the prettiest Boston fern in town, and that no bow-window is properly decorated at any wedding without that fern. In larger towns the same news item would appear thus:

"Cards are out announcing the wedding of Miss Cecil Norton and Mr. Collis R. Hatcher at the home of the bride's parents, Mr. and Mrs. T. J. Norton, 1022 High street, June 15."

A plain drunk is generally referred to in our columns as a "guest of Marshal Furgeson's informal house-party," and when a group of drunk-and-disorderlies is brought in we feel free to say of their evening diversion that they "spent the happy hours, after refreshments, playing progressive hell." And this brings us to the consideration of the most important personage with whom we have to deal. In what we call "social circles," the most important personages are Mrs. Julia Neal Worthington and Mrs. Priscilla Winthrop Conklin, who keep two hired girls and can pay five dollars a week for them when the prevailing price is three. In financial circles the most important personage is John Markley, who buys real-estate mortgages; in political circles the most important personage is Charlie Hedrick who knows the railroad attorneys at the capital and always can get passes for the county delegation to the State convention; in the railroad-yards the most important personage is the division superintendent, who smokes ten-cent cigars and has the only "room with a bath" at the Hotel Metropole. But with us, in the publication of our newspaper, the most important personage in town is Marshal Furgeson.

If you ever looked out of the car-window as you passed through town, you undoubtedly saw him at the depot, walking nervously up and down the platform, peering into the faces of strangers. He is ever on the outlook for crooks, though nothing more violent has happened in our county for years than an assault and battery. But Marshal Furgeson never relinquishes his watch. In winter, clad in his blue uniform and campaign hat, he is a familiar figure on our streets; and in summer, without coat or vest, with his big silver star on which is stamped "Chief of Police," pinned to his suspender, he may be seen at any point where trouble is least likely to break out. He is the only man on the town site whom we are afraid to tease, because he is our chief source of news; for if we ruffle his temper he sees to it that our paper misses the details of the next chicken-raid that comes under his notice. He can bring us to time in short order.

When we particularly desire to please him we refer to him as "the authorities." If the Palace Grocery has been invaded through the back window and a box of plug tobacco stolen, Marshal Furgeson is delighted to read in the paper that "the authorities have an important clew and the arrest may be expected at any time." He is "the authorities." If "the authorities have their eyes on a certain barber-shop on South Main Street, which is supposed to be doing a back-door beer business," he again is "the authorities," and contends that the word strikes more terror into the hearts of evil-doers than the mere name, Marshal Furgeson.

Next in rank to "the authorities," in the diplomatic corps of the office, come our advertisers: the proprietors of the White Front Dry-Goods Store, the Golden Eagle Clothing Store, and the Bee Hive. These men can come nearer to dictating the paper's policy than the bankers and politicians, who are supposed to control country newspapers. Though we are charged with being the "organ" of any of half-a-dozen politicians whom we happen to speak of kindly at various times, we have little real use for politicians in our office, and a business man who brings in sixty or seventy dollars' worth of advertising every month has more influence with us than all the politicians in the county. This is the situation in most newspaper offices that succeed, and when any other situation prevails, when politicians control editors, the newspapers don't pay well, and sooner or later the politicians are bankrupt.

The only person in town whom all the merchants desire us to poke fun at is Mail-Order Petrie. Mail-Order Petrie is a miserly old codger who buys everything out of town that he can buy a penny cheaper than the home merchants sell it. He is a hard-working man, so far as that goes, and so stingy that he has been accused of going barefooted in the summer time to save shoes. When he is sick he sends out of town for patent medicines, and for ten years he worked in his truck-garden, fighting floods and droughts, bugs and blight, to save something like a hundred dollars, which he put in a mail-order bank in St. Louis. When it failed he grinned at the fellows who twitted him of his loss, and said: "Oh, come easy, go easy!"

A few years ago he subscribed to a matrimonial paper, and one day he appeared at the office of the probate judge with a mail-order wife, who, when they had been married a few years, went to an orphan asylum and got a mail-order baby. We have had considerable sport with Mail-Order Petrie, and he has become so used to it that he likes it. Sometimes on dull days he comes around to the office to tell us what a bargain he got at this or that mail-order house, and last summer he came in to tell us about a great bargain in a cemetery lot in a new cemetery being laid out in Kansas City; he bought it on the installment plan, a dollar down and twenty-five cents a month, to be paid until he died, and he bragged a great deal about his shrewdness in getting the lot on those terms. He chuckled as he said that he would be dead in five years at the most and would have a seventy-five dollar lot for a mere song. He made us promise that when that time does come we will write up his obsequies under the head "A Mail-Order Funeral." He added, as he stood with his hand on the door screen, that he had no use for the preachers and the hypocrites in the churches in this town, and that he was taking a paper called the "Magazine of Mysteries," that teaches some new ideas on religion and that he expects to wind up in a mail-order Heaven.

And this is the material with which we do our day's work—Mail-Order Petrie, Marshal Furgeson, the pretty girls in the flower parade, the wise clubwomen, the cut-glass society crowd, the proud owner of the automobile, the "respectable parties concerned," the proprietor of the Golden Eagle, the clerks in the Bee Hive, the country crook who aspires to be a professional criminal some day, "the leading citizen," who spends much of his time seeing the sights of his country, the college boys who wear funny clothes and ribbons on their hats, and the politicians, greedy for free advertising. They are ordinary two-legged men and women, and if there is one thing more than any other that marks our town, it is its charity, and the mercy that is at the bottom of all its real impulses.

Our business seems to outsiders to be a cruel one, because we have to deal as mere business with such sacred things as death and birth, the meeting and parting of friends, and with tragedies as well as with comedies. This is true. Every man—even a piano tuner—thinks his business leads him a dog's life, and that it shows him only the seamy side of the world. But our business, though it shows the seams, shows us more of good than of bad in men. We are not cynics in our office; for we know in a thousand ways that the world is good. We know that at the end of the day we have set down more good deeds than bad deeds, and that the people in our town will keep the telephone bell ringing to-morrow, more to praise the recital of a good action than they will to talk to us about some evil thing that we had to print.

Time and again we have been surprised at the charity of our people. They are always willing to forgive, and be it man or woman who takes a misstep in our town—which is the counterpart of hundreds of American towns—if the offender shows that he wishes to walk straight, a thousand hands are stretched out to help him and guide him. It is not true that a man or woman who makes a mistake is eternally damned by his fellows. If one persists in wrong after the first misdeed it is not because sheltering love and kindness were not thrown around the wrongdoer. We have in our town women who have done wrong and have lived down their errors just as men do, and have been forgiven. A hundred times in our office we have talked these things over and have been proud of our people and of their humanity. We are all neighbours and friends, and when sorrow comes, no one is alone. The town's greatest tragedies have proved the town's sympathy, and have been worth their cost.

II
The Young Prince

We have had many reporters for our little country newspaper—some good ones, who have gone up to the city and have become good newspaper men; some bad ones, who have gone back to the livery-stables from which they sprang; and some indifferent ones, who have drifted into the insurance business and have become silent partners in student boarding-houses, taking home the meat for dinner and eating finically at the second table of life, with a first table discrimination. But of all the boys who have sat at the old walnut desk by the window, the Young Prince gave us the most joy. Before he came on the paper he was bell-boy at the National Hotel—bell-hop, he called himself—and he first attracted our attention by handing in personal items written in a fat, florid hand. He seemed to have second sight. He knew more news than anyone else in town—who had gone away, who was entertaining company, who was getting married, and who was sick or dying.

The day the Young Prince went to work he put on his royal garment—a ten-dollar ready-made costume that cost him two weeks' hard work. But it was worth the effort. His freckled face and his tawny shock of red hair rose above the gorgeous plaid of the clothes like a prairie sunset, and as he pranced off down the street he was clearly proud of his job. This pride never left him. He knew all the switchmen in the railroad yards, all the girls in the dry-goods stores, all the boys on the grocers' waggons, all the hack-drivers and all the barbers in town.

These are the great sources of news for a country daily. The reporter who confines his acquaintance to doctors, lawyers, merchants and preachers is always complaining of dull days.

But there was never a dull day with the Young Prince. When he could get the list of "those present" at a social function in no other way, he called up the hired girl of the festal house—we are such a small town that only the rich bankers keep servants—and "made a date" with her, and the names always appeared in the paper the next day; whereupon the proud hostess, who thought it was bad form to give out the names of her guests, sent down and bought a dozen extra copies of the paper to send away to her Eastern kin. He knew all the secrets of the switch shanty. Our paper printed the news of a change in the general superintendent's office of the railroad before the city papers had heard of it, and we usually figured it out that the day after the letter denying our story had come down from the Superintendent's office the change would be officially announced.

One day when the Prince was at the depot "making the train" with his notebook in his hand, jotting down the names of the people who got on or off the cars, the general superintendent saw him, and called the youth to his car.

"Well, kid," said the most worshipful one in his teasingest voice, "What's the latest news at the general offices to-day?"

The Young Prince turned his head on one side like a little dog looking up at a big dog, and replied:

"Well, if you must know it, you're going to get the can, though we ain't printing it till you've got a chance to land somewhere else."

The longer the Prince worked the more clothes he bought. One of his most effective creations was a blue serge coat and vest, and a pair of white duck trousers linked by emotional red socks to patent-leather shoes. This confection, crowned with a wide, saw-edged straw hat with a blue band, made him the brightest bit of colour on the sombre streets of our dull town. He wore his collars so high that he had to order them of a drummer, and as he came down street from the depot, riding magnificently with the 'bus-driver, after the train had gone, the clerks used to cry: "Look out for your horses; the steam-piano is coming!"

But it didn't affect the Young Prince. If he happened to have time and was feeling like it, he would climb down over the rear end of the 'bus and chase his tormentor into the back of the store where he worked, but generally the Young Prince took no heed of the jibes of the envious. He was conscious that he was cutting a figure, and this consciousness made him proud. But his pride did not cut down the stack of copy that he laid on the table every morning and every noon. He couldn't spell and he was innocent of grammar, and every line he wrote had to be edited, but he got the news. He was every where. He rushed down the streets after an item, dodging in and out of stores and offices like a streak of chain lightning having a fit. But it was beneath his dignity to run to fires. When the fire-bell rang, he waited nonchalantly on the corner near the fire-department house, and as the crowds parted to let the horses dash by on the dead run, he would walk calmly to the middle of the street, put his notebook in his pocket, and, as the fire-team plunged by, he would ostentatiously throw out a stiff leg behind him like the tail of a comet, and "flip" onto the end of the fire-waggon. Then he would turn slowly around, raise a hand, and wiggle his fingers patronisingly at the girls in front of the Racket Store as he flew past, swaying his body with the motion of the rolling, staggering cart.

Other reporters who have been on the paper—the good ones as well as the bad—have had to run the gauntlet of the town jokers who delight to give green reporters bogus news, or start them out hunting impossible items. But the man who soberly told the Young Prince that O. F. C. Taylor was visiting at the home of the town drunkard, or that W. H. McBreyer had accepted a position in a town drug-store, only got a wink and a grin from the boy. Neither did the town wags fool him by giving him a birth announcement from the wrong family, nor a wedding where there was none. He was wise as a serpent. Where he got his wisdom, no one knows. He had the town catalogued in a sort of rogues' directory—the liars and the honest men set apart from one another, and it was a classification that would not have tallied with the church directories nor with the town blue-book nor with the commercial agency's reports. The sheep and the goats in the Young Prince's record would have been strangers to one another if they could have been assembled as he imagined them. But he was generally right in his estimates of men. He had a sixth sense for sham.

The Young Prince had the sense to know the truth and the courage to write it. This is the essence of the genius that is required to make a good newspaper man. No paper has trouble getting reporters who can hand in copy that records events from the outside. Any blockhead can go to a public meeting and bring in a report that has the words "as follows" scattered here and there down the columns. But the reporter who can go and bring back the soul of the meeting, the real truth about it —what the inside fights meant that lay under the parliamentary politenesses of the occasion; who can see the wires that reach back of the speakers, and see the man who is moving the wires and can know why he is moving them; who can translate the tall talking into history—he is a real reporter. And the Young Prince was that kind of a youth. He went to the core of everything; and if we didn't dare print the truth—as sometimes we did not—he grumbled for a week about his luck. As passionately as he loved his clothes, he was always ready to get them dirty in the interests of his business.

For three years his nimble feet pounded the sidewalks of the town. He knew no business hours, and ate and slept with his work. He never ceased to be a reporter—never took off his make-up, never let down from his exalted part. One day he fell sick of a fever, and for three weeks fretted and fumed in delirium. In his dreams he wrote pay locals, and made trains, and described funerals, got lists of names for the society column, and grumbled because his stuff was cut or left over till the next day. When he awoke he was weak and wan, and they felt that they must tell him the truth.

The doctor took the boy's hands and told him very simply what they feared. He looked at the man for a moment in dumb wonder, and sighed a long, tired sigh. Then he said: "Well, if I must, here goes"—and turned his face to the wall and closed his eyes without a tremor.

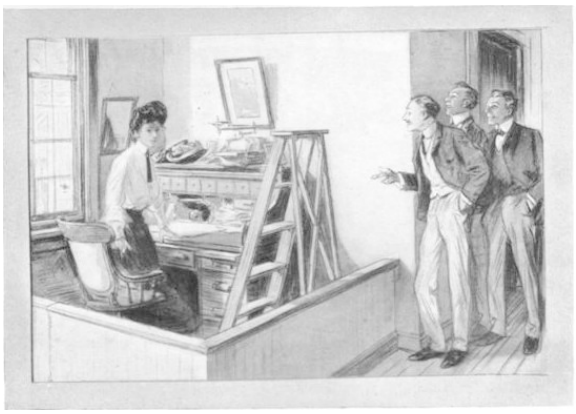
And thus the Young Prince went home.

III
The Society Editor

They say that in the newspaper offices of the city men work in ruts; that the editorial writer never reports an item, no matter how much he knows of it; that a reporter is not allowed to express an editorial view of a subject, even though he be well qualified to speak; but on our little country daily newspaper it is entirely different. We work on the interchangeable point system. Everyone writes items, all of us get advertising and job-work when it comes our way, and when one of us writes anything particularly good, it is marked for the editorial page. The religious reporter does the racing matinée in Wildwood Park, and the financial editor who gets the market reports from the feed-store men also gets any church news that comes along.

The only time we ever established a department was when we made Miss Larrabee society editor. She came from the high school, where her graduating essay on Kipling attracted our attention, and, after an office council had decided that a Saturday society page would be a paying proposition.

At first, say for six months after she came to the office, Miss Larrabee devoted herself to the accumulation of professional pride. This pride was as much a part of her life as her pompadour, which at that time was so high that she had to tiptoe to reach it. However she managed to keep it up was the wonder of the office. Finally, we all agreed that she must use chicken-fence. She denied this, but was inclined to be good-natured about it, and, as an office-joke, the boys used to leave a step-ladder by her desk so that she could climb up and see how her top-knot really looked. Nothing ruffled her spirits, and we soon quit teasing her and began to admire her work. In addition to filling six columns of the Saturday's paper with her society report in a town where a church social is important enough to justify publishing the names of those who wait on the tables, Miss Larrabee was a credit to the office.



As an office joke the boys used to leave a step-ladder by her desk so that she could climb up and see how her top-knot really looked

She was always invited to the entertainments at the homes of the Worthingtons and the Conklins, who had stationary wash-tubs in the basements of their houses, and who ate dinner instead of supper in the evening; and when she put on what the boys called her trotting harness, her silk petticoats rustled louder than any others at the party. One day she suddenly dropped her pompadour and appeared with her hair parted in the middle and doused over her ears in long, undulating billows. No other girl in town came within a quarter of an inch of Miss Larrabee's dare. When straight-fronts became stylish, Miss Larrabee was a vertical marvel, and when she rolled up her sleeves and organized a country club, she referred to her shoes as boots and took the longest steps in town. But with it all she was no mere clothes-horse. We drilled it into her head during her first two weeks

that "society" news in a country town means not merely the doings of the cut-glass set, but that it means as well the doings of the Happy Hoppers, the Trundle-Bed Trash, the Knights of Columbus, the Rathbone Sisters, the King's Daughters, the Epworth League, the Christian Endeavourers, the Woman's Relief Corps, the Ladies' Aid and the Home Missionary Societies, Miss Nelson's Dancing Class, the Switchmen's annual ball—if we get their job-work—and every kindred, every tribe, except such as gather in what is known as "kitchen sweats" and occasionally send in calls for the police. When Miss Larrabee got this into her head she began to groan under her burden, and by the end of the year, though she had great pride in her profession, she affected to loathe her department.

Weddings were her especial abominations. When the first social cloud appeared on the horizon indicating the approach of a series of showers for the bride which would culminate in a cloudburst at some stone church, Miss Larrabee would begin to rumble like distant thunder and, as the storm grew thicker, she would flash out crooked chain-lightning imprecations on the heads of the young people, their fathers and mothers and uncles and aunts. By the day of the wedding she would be rolling a steady diapason of polite, decolourised, expurgated, ladylike profanity.

While she sat at her desk writing the stereotyped account of the event, it was like picking up a live wire to speak to her. As she wrote, we could tell at just what stage she had arrived in her copy. Thus, if she said to the adjacent atmosphere, "What a whopper!" we knew that she had written, "The crowning glory of a happy fortnight of social gatherings found its place when–" and when she hissed out, "Mortgaged clear to the eaves and full of installment furniture!" we felt that she had reached a point something like this: "After the ceremony the gay party assembled at the palatial home." In a moment she would snarl: "I am dead tired of seeing Mrs. Merriman's sprawly old fern and the Bosworth palm. I wish they would stop lending them!" and then we realised that she had reached the part of her write-up which said: "The chancel rail was banked with a profusion of palms and ferns and rare tropical plants." She always groaned when she came to the "simple and impressive ring ceremony." When she wrote:

"The distinguished company came forward to offer congratulations to the newly-wedded pair," she would say as she sharpened her pencil-point: "There's nothing like a wedding to reveal what a raft of common kin people have," and we knew that it was all over and that she was closing the article with: "A dazzling array of costly and beautiful presents was exhibited in the library," for then she would pick up her copy, dog-ear the sheets, and jab them on the hook as she sighed: "Another great American pickle-dish exhibit ended."

In the way she did two things Miss Larrabee excited the wonder and admiration of the office. One was the way that she kept tab on brides. We heard through her of the brides who could cook, and of those who were beginning life by accumulating a bright little pile of tin cans in the alley. She knew the brides who could do their own sewing and those who could not. She had the single girl's sniff at the bride who wore her trousseau season after season, made over and fixed up, and she gave the office the benefit of her opinion of the husband in the case who had a new tailor-made suit every fall and spring. She scented young married troubles from afar, and we knew in the office whether his folks were edging up on her, or her people were edging up on him. If a young married man danced more than twice in one evening with anyone but his wife, Miss Larrabee made faces at his back when he passed the office window, and if she caught a young married woman flirting, Miss Larrabee regaled us by telling with whom the woman in question had opened a "fresh bottle of emotions."

The other way in which Miss Larrabee displayed genius for her work was in describing women's costumes. Three or four times a year, when there are large social gatherings, we print descriptions of the women's gowns. Only three women in our town, Mrs. Worthington, Mrs. Conklin, and the second Mrs. Markley, have more than one new party dress in a twelve-month, and most of the women make a party gown last two or three years. Miss Larrabee was familiar with every dress in town. She knew it made over, and no woman was cunning enough to conceal the truth even with a spangled yoke, a chiffon bertha, or a net over-dress; yet Miss Larrabee would describe the gown, not merely twice,

but half a dozen times, so that the woman wearing it might send the description to her relatives back East without arousing their suspicion that she was wearing the same dress year after year. Therefore, whenever Miss Larrabee wrote up the dresses worn at a party, we were sure to sell from fifty to a hundred extra papers. She could so turn a breastpin and a homemade point-lace handkerchief tucked in the front of a good old lady's best black satin into "point-lace and diamonds," that they were always good for a dozen copies of the paper, and she never overlooked the dress of the wife of a good advertiser, no matter how plain it might be.

She was worth her wages to the office merely as a compendium of shams. She knew whether the bridal couple, who announced that they would spend their honeymoon in the East, were really going to Niagara Falls, or whether they were going to spend a week with his relatives in Decatur, Illinois. She knew every woman in town who bought two prizes for her whist party—one to give if her friend should win the prize, and another to give if the woman she hated should win. With the diabolical eye of a fiend she detected the woman who was wearing the dry-cleaned cast-off clothing of her sister in the city. What she saw the office knew, though she kept her conclusions out of the paper if they would do any harm or hurt anyone's feelings. No pretender ever dreamed that she was not fooling Miss Larrabee. She was willing to agree most sympathetically with Mrs. Conklin, who insisted that the "common people" wouldn't be interested in the list of names at her party; and the only place where we ever saw Miss Larrabee's claw in print was in the insistent misspelling of the name of a woman who made it a point to ridicule the paper.

We have had other girls around the office since Miss Larrabee left, but they do not seem to get the work done with any system. She was not only industrious but practical. Friday mornings, when her work piled up, instead of fussing around the office and chattering at the telephone, she would dive into her desk and bring up her regular list of adjectives. These she would copy on three slips, carefully dividing the list so that no one had a duplicate, and in the afternoon each of the boys received a slip with a list of parties, and with instructions to scatter the adjectives she had given him through the accounts of the parties assigned to him—and the work was soon done. There was no scratching the head for synonyms for "beautiful," "superb" or "elegant." Miss Larrabee had doled out to each of us the adjectives necessary, and, given the adjectives, society reporting is easy. The editing of the copy is easy also, for one does not have to remember whether or not the refreshments were "delicious" at the Jones party when he sees the word in connection with the viands at the Smith party. No two parties were ever "elegant" the same week. No two events were "charming." No two women were "exquisitely" gowned. The person who was assigned the adjective "delightful" by Miss Larrabee might stick it in front of a luncheon, pin it on a hostess, or use it for an evening's entertainment. But he could use it only once. And with a list of those present and the adjectives thereunto appertaining, even a new boy could get up a column in half an hour. She had an artist's pride in the finished work, however much she might dislike the thing in making, and she used to sail down to the press-room as soon as the paper was out, and, picking up the paper from the folder, she would stand reading her page, line upon line, precept upon precept, though every word and syllable was familiar to her.

During her first year she joined the Woman's State Press Club, but she discovered that she was the only real worker in the club and never attended a second meeting. She told us that too many of the women wore white stockings and low shoes, read their own unpublished short stories, and regarded her wide-shouldered shirtwaist and melodramatic openwork hosiery with suspicion and alarm.

As the years passed, and wedding after wedding sizzled under her pen, she complained to us that she was beginning to be called "auntie" in too many houses, and that the stock of available young men who didn't wear their handkerchiefs under their collars at the dances had dwindled down to three. This reality faces every girl who lives in a country town. Then she is left with two alternatives: to go visiting or to begin bringing them up by hand.

Miss Larrabee went visiting. At the end of a month she wrote: "It's all over with me. He is a nice fellow, and has a job doing 'Live Topics About Town' here on the *Sun*. Give my job to the little

Wheatly girl, and tell her to quit writing poetry, and hike up her dress in the back. My adjectives are in the left-hand corner of the desk under 'When Knighthood Was in Flower.' And do you suppose you could get me and the grand keeper of the records and seals a pass home for Christmas if I'd do you a New York letter some time?

"They say these city papers are hog tight!"

IV
"As a Breath into the Wind"

We are proud of the machinery in our office—the two linotypes, the big perfecting press and the little jobbers. They are endowed by office traditions with certain human attributes—having their moods and vagaries and tantrums—so we love them as men love children. And this is a queer thing about them: though our building is pocked with windows that are open by day seven months in the year, and though the air of the building is clean enough, save for the smell of the ink, yet at night, after the machines have been idle for many hours and are probably asleep, the place smells like the lair of wild animals. By day they are as clean as machines may be kept. And even in the days when David Lewis petted them and coddled them and gave them the core of his heart, they were speckless, and bright as his big, brown, Welsh eyes, but the night stinks of them were rank and beastly.

David came to us, a stray cat, fifteen years ago. He was too small to wrestle with the forms —being cast in the nonpareil mould of his race—and so we put him to carrying papers. In school season he seemed to go to school, and in summer it is certain that he put a box on a high stool in the back room, and learned the printer's case, and fed the job presses at odd times, and edged on to the pay-roll without ever having been formally hired. In the same surreptitious manner he slipped a cot into the stockroom upstairs and slept there, and finally had it fitted up as a bedroom, and so became an office fixture.

By the time his voice had stopped squeaking he was a good printer, and what with using the front office for a study at night, and the New York papers and the magazines for textbooks, he had acquired a good working education. Whereupon he fell in love with two divinities at once—the blonde one working in the Racket Store, on Main Street, and the other, a new linotype that we installed the year before McKinley's first election. His heart was sadly torn between them. He never went to bed under midnight after calling on either of them, and, having the Celt's natural aptitude to get at the soul of either women or intricate mechanism, in a year he was engaged to both; but naturally enough a brain fever overtook him, and he lay on a cot at the Sisters' Hospital and jabbered strange things.

Among other things the priest who sat beside him one day heard Latin verse; whereat the father addressed David in the language of the Church and received reply in kind. And they talked solemnly about matters theological for five minutes, David's voice changing to the drone of the liturgist's and his face flushing with uncaged joy. In an hour there were three priests with the boy, and he spoke in Latin to them without faltering. He discussed abstruse ecclesiastical questions and claimed incidentally to be an Italian priest dead a score of years, and, to prove his claim, described Rome and the Vatican as it was before Leo's day. Then he fell asleep and the next day was better and knew no Latin, but insisted on reading the note under his pillow which his girl had sent him. After that he wanted to know how New York stood in the National League and how Hans Wagner's batting record was, and proceeded to get well in short order.

David resumed his place in the office, and when we put in the perfecting press he added another string to his bow. The press and the linotype and his girl were his life's passions, and his position as short-stop in the Maroons, and as snare-drummer in the Second Regiment band, were his diversions. He wore clothes well and became president of the Imperial Dancing Club—chiefly to please his girl, who desired social position. A boy with twelve dollars a week in a country town, who will spend a dollar or two a month to have his clothes pressed, can accomplish any social heights which rise before him, and there is no barrier in our town to a girl merely because she presides at the ribbon-counter; which, of course, is as it should be.

So David became a town personage. When the linotype operator left, we gave David the place. Now he courted only one of his sweethearts by night, and found time for other things. Also we gave

him three dollars a week more to spend, and the Imperial Club got most of it—generally through the medium of the blonde in the Racket Store, who was cultivating a taste for diamonds, and liked to wear flowers at the more formal dances.

Now, unless they are about to be married, a boy of twenty may not call on a girl of nineteen in a respectable family, a member of the Plymouth Daughters, and a graduate of the High School, oftener than four nights in the week, without exciting more or less neighbourly comment; but David and the girl were merely going together—as the parlance of our town has it—and though they were engaged they had no idea of getting married at any definite time. David thus had three nights in the seven which might be called open. The big press would not receive him by night, and he spent his love on his linotype by day; so he was lonesome and longed for the society of his kind. The billiard-hall did not tempt him; but at the cigar-store he met and fell under the spell of Henry Larmy—known of the town as "Old Hen," though he was not two score years gone—and the two began chumming together.

"Old Hen" worked in a tin-shop, read Ruskin, regarded Debs as a prophet, received many papers devoted to socialism and the New Thought, and believed that he believed in no man, no God and no devil. Also he was a woman-hater, and though he never turned his head for a petticoat, preached free-love and bought many books which promised to tell him how to become a hypnotist. At various times, Larmy's category of beliefs included the single-tax, Buddhism, spiritualism, and a faith in the curative properties of blue glass. David and Henry Larmy would sit in the office of evenings discussing these things when honest people should be in bed.

Henry never could tell us just how the talk drifted to hypnotism and the occult, nor when the current started that way. But one of the reporters who happened to be driven off the street by the rain one night found Henry and David in the office with a homemade planchette doing queer things. They made it tell words in the middle of pages of newspapers that neither had opened. They made it write answers to sums that neither had calculated, and they made it give the names of Henry's relatives dead and gone—also those that were living, whom David, who was operating it, did not know. The thing would not move for the man, but the boy's fingers on it made it fly. Some way the triangular board broke, and the reporter and Henry were pop-eyed with wonder to see David hold his hands above the pencil and make it write, dragging a splinter of board behind it. David yawned five or six times and lay down on the office couch, and when he got up a moment later his hands were fingering the air, his lips fluttering like the wings of fledglings, and he seemed to be trying some new kind of lingo. He did not look about him, but went straight to the table, gripped the air above the pencil with the broken board upon it, and the pencil came up and began writing something, evidently in verse. David's face was shiny and smiling the while, but his eyes were fixed, though his lips moved as they do when one writes and is unused to it. Larmy stared at the boy with open mouth, clearly afraid of the spectacle that was before him. A night creaking of the building made him jump, and he moistened his lips as the pencil wrote on. When the sheet was filled, the pencil fell and David looked about him with a smile and dropping his head on the desk began to yawn. He seemed to be coming out of a deep sleep, and grinned up blinking: "Gee, I must 'a' gone to sleep on you fellows. I was up late last night."

Larmy told the boy what had happened, and the three of them looked at the paper, but could make nothing of it. David shook his head.

"Not on your life," he laughed. "What do you fellers take me for—a phonograph having the D. T.'s, or a mimeograph with a past? Uh-huh! Not for little David! Why—say, that is some kind of Dutch!"

The reporter knew enough to know that it was Latin, but his High School days were five years behind him, and he could not translate it. The Latin professor at the college, however, said that it seemed to be an imitation of Ovid.

And the next time the reporter saw a light in the office window he broke into the seance. When the boy and his girl were not holding down the sofa at her father's home, or when there was no dance

at the Imperial Club hall, nor any other social diversion, David and Larmy and the reporter would meet at the office and dive into things too deep for Horatio's philosophy.

Their favourite theme was the immortality of the soul, and when they were on this theme David would get nervous, pace up and down the office, and finally throw himself on the lounge and begin to yawn. Whereupon a control, or state of mind, or personality that called itself Fra Guiseppi would rise to consciousness and dominate the boy. Larmy and the reporter called it "father," and talked to it with considerable jocularity, considering that the father claimed they were talking to a ghost. It would do odd things for them; go into rooms where David had never been: describe their furnishings and occupants accurately; read the numbers on watches of prominent citizens, which the reporter would verify the next day; and pretend to bring other departed spirits into the room to discuss various matters. Larmy had a pleasant social chat with Karl Marx, and had the spirits hunting all over the kingdom-come for Tom Paine and Murat. But the messenger either could not find them, or the line was busy with someone else, so these worthies never appeared.

Still, this must be said of the "father," that it had a philosophy of life, and a distinct personality far deeper and more charming and in some way sweeter than David's; that it talked with an accent, which to the hearers seemed Italian, and in a voice that certainly could not have been the boy's by any trick of ventriloquism. One night in their talks Larmy said:

"'Father,' you say you believe that the judgments of God are just—how do you account for the sufferings, the heartaches, the sorrows, the misery that come in the wake of those judgments? Here is a great railway accident that strikes down twenty people, renders some cripples for life, kills others. Here is a flood that sweeps away the property of good men and bad men. Is that just? What compensation is there for it?"

The "father" put his chin in one hand and remained silent for a time, as one deep in thought; then he replied:

"That is—what you call—life. That is what makes life, life; what makes it different from the existence we know now. All your misfortunes, your hardships, your joys, all your miseries and failures and triumphs—these are the school of the soul which you call life. It is a preparation for the hereafter."

And David waking knew nothing of the thing that possessed him sleeping. When they told him, he would smoke his cigarette, and make reply that he must have had 'em pretty bad this time, or that he was glad he wasn't that "buggy" when he was awake.

David's talent soon became known in the office. We used to call it his spook, but only once did we harness it to practical business and that was when old Charley Hedrick, the local boss, was picking a candidate for the Legislature. The reporter and Larmy asked the "father" one night if it could get us connected with Mr. Hedrick. It said it would try; it needed help. And there appeared another personality with which they were more or less familiar, called the Jew. The Jew claimed to be a literary man, and said it would act as receiver while the father acted as transmitter on Hedrick. Then they got this one-sided telephonic conversation in a thick, wheezy voice that was astonishingly like Hedrick's:

"Harmony—hell, yes; we're always getting the harmony and the Worthington state bank gets the offices." Then a pause ensued. "Well, let'em bolt. I'm getting tired of giving up the whole county ticket to them fellows to keep 'em from bolting." After another pause, he seemed to answer someone: "Oh, Bill?—you can't trust him! He's played both sides in this town for ten years. What I want isn't a man to satisfy them, but just this once I want a man who won't be even under the suspicion of satisfying them. I want a fellow to satisfy me." The other side of the telephone must have spoken, for this came: "Well, then, we'll bust their damn bank! Did you see their last statement: cash down to fifteen per cent. and no dividends on half a million assets for a year and a half? Something's rotten there. They're a lot of 'toads in a poisoned tank,' as old Browning says. If they want a fight, they can have it." After the silence he replied: "I tell you fellows they can't afford a fight. And, anyway, there'll never be peace in this town till we get things on the basis of one bank, one newspaper, one

wife and one country, and the way to do that is to get out in the open and fight. If I've got as much sense as a rabbit I say that Ab Handy is the man, and whether I'm right or wrong I'm going to run him." He seemed to retort to some objector: "Yes, and the first thing you know he'd come charging up to the Speaker's desk with a maximum freight-rate bill, or a stock-yards bill—and where would I be? I tell you he won't stand hitched. He'll swell up like a pizened pup, and you couldn't handle him. Where'd any of us be, if the Representative from this county got to pawing the air for reform? I know Jake as though I'd been through him with a lantern." There must have been a discussion of some kind among the others, for a lengthy interim followed; then the voice continued: "Elect him?—of course we can elect him. I can get five hundred from the State Committee and we can raise that much down here. This is a Republican year, and we could elect Judas Iscariot against any of the eleven brethren this year on the Republican ticket, and I tell you it's Ab. You fellows can do as you please, but I'm going to run Ab."

Then, being full of political curiosity rather than impelled by a desire for psychological research, the reporter slipped out and waited in a stairway opposite the Exchange National Bank building until the light in Hedrick's law office was extinguished. Then he saw old Charley and his henchmen come out, one at a time, look cautiously up and down the street and go forth in different, devious ways. The story in our paper the next day of the candidacy of Ab Handy threw consternation into the ranks of the enemy. We had printed the conversation as it had occurred, after which five men publicly contended that one of their number was a traitor.

The summer browned the pastures, and the coming of autumn brought trouble for David Lewis, president of the Imperial Dancing Club, short-stop for the Maroons, snare-drummer in the band, and operator of linotypes. We who are at the period of life where love is a harvest forget the days of the harrow, and are prone to smile at the season of the seeding. We do not know that the heaviest burden God puts on a young soul is a burden of the heart. A travelling silk-salesman, with a haughty manner and a two-hundred-dollar job, saw the blonde in the Racket Store and began calling at her father's home like the captain of an army with banners. David, being only an armour-bearer at fifteen dollars a week, found heartbreak in it all for him. A girl of twenty is so much older than a boy of twenty-one that the blonde began to assume a maternal attitude toward the boy, and he took to walking afield on Sundays, looking at the sky in agony and asking his little "now-I-lay-me" God, what life was given to him for. He fabricated a legend that she was selling herself for gold, and when the haughty manner and the blonde sped by David's window behind jingling sleigh-bells that winter, David, sitting at the machine, got back proofs from the front office that looked like war-maps of a strange country. Moreover he let his matrices go uncleaned until they were beardy as wheat and the bill of repairs on the machine had begun to rise like a cat's back.

All of this may seem funny in the telling, but to see the little Welshman's heart breaking in him was no pleasant matter. The girls in the office pitied the boy, and hoped the silk-drummer would break her heart. The town and the Imperial Club, whereof David was much beloved, took sides with him, and knew his sorrow for their own. As for the blonde, it was only nature asserting itself in her; so David got back his little chip diamonds, and his bangle bracelet, and his copy of "Riley's Love Songs," and there was the "mist and the blinding rain" for him, and the snow of winter hardened on the sidewalks.

To console himself, the boy traded for a music-box, which he set going with a long brass lever. Its various tunes were picked in holes on circular steel sheets, which were fed into the box and set whirling with the lever. At night when Larmy wasn't enjoying what David called a spook-fest, the boy would sit in the office by the hour and listen to his music-box. He must have played "Love's Golden Dream Is Past" a hundred lonesome times that winter (it had been their favourite waltz—his and the girl's—at the Imperial Club), and it was a safe guess that if the boys in the office, as they passed the box at noon, would give the lever a yank, from the abdomen of the contrivance the

waltz song would begin deep and low to rumble and swell out with all the simulation of sorrow that a mechanical soul may express.

As the winter deepened, Larmy and the reporter and the "father" had more and more converse. The "father" explained a theory of immortality which did not interest the reporter, but which Larmy heard eagerly. It said that science would resolve matter into mere forms of motion, which are expressions of divine will, and that the only place where this divine will exists in its pure state, eluding the so-called material state, is in the human soul. Further, the "father" explained that this soul, or divine will, exists without the brain, independent of brain tissue, as may be proved by the accepted phenomena of hypnotism, where the soul is commanded to leave the body and see and hear and feel and know things which the mere physical organs can not experience, owing to the interposition of space. The "father" said that at death the Divine Will commands the ripened seed of life to leave the body and assume immortality, just as that Will commands the seeds of plants and the sperm of animals to assume their natural functions. The Thing that talked through David's lips said that the body is the seed-pod of the soul, and that souls grow little or much as they are planted and environed and nurtured by life. All this it said in many nights, while Larmy wondered and the reporter scoffed and stuck pins in David to see if he could feel them. And the boy wakened from his dreams always to say: "Gimme a cigarette!" and to reach over and pull the lever of his music-box, and add: "Perfessor, give us a tune! Hen, the professor says he won't play unless you give me a cigarette for him."

One night, after a long wrangle which ended in a discourse by the "father," a strange thing happened. Larmy and It were contending as to whether It was merely a hypnotic influence on the boy, of someone living whom they did not know, or what It claimed to be, a disembodied spirit. By way of diversion, the reporter had just run a binder's needle under one of the boy's finger-nails to see whether he would flinch. Then the Voice that was coming from David's mouth spoke and said: "I will show you something to prove it;" and the entranced boy rose and went to the back room, while the two others followed him.

He turned the lever that flashed the light on his linotype, and set the little motor going. He lifted up the lid of the metal-pot, to see if the fire was keeping it molten. Then the boy sat at the machine with his hands folded in his lap, gazing at the empty copy-holder out of dead eyes. In a minute—perhaps it was a little longer—a brass matrix slipped from the magazine and clicked down into the assembler; in a second or two another fell, and then, very slowly, like the ticks of a great clock, the brasses slipped—slipped—slipped into their places, and the steel spaces dropped into theirs. A line was formed, while the boy's hands lay in his lap. When it was a full line he grabbed the lever, that sent the line over to the metal-pot to be cast, and his hand fell back in his lap, while the dripping of the brasses continued and the blue and white keys on the board sank and rose, although no finger touched them.

Larmy squinted at the thing, and held his long, fuzzy, unshaven chin in his hand. When the second line was cast the reporter broke the silence with: "Well, I'll be damned!" And the Voice from David's mouth replied: "Very likely." And the clicking of the brasses grew quicker.

Seven lines were cast and then the boy got up and went back to the couch in the front room, where he yawned himself, apparently, through three strata of consciousness, into his normal self. They took a proof of what had been cast, but it was in Latin and they could not translate it. David himself forgot about it the next day, but the reporter, being impressed and curious, took the proof to the teacher of Latin at the college, who translated it thus: "*He shall go away on a long journey across the ocean, and he shall not return, yet the whole town shall see him again and know him—and he shall bring back the song that is in his heart, and you shall hear it.*"

The next week the "Maine" was blown up, and in the excitement the troubles of David were forgotten in the office. Moreover, as he had to work overtime he put his soul deeper into the machine, and his nerves took on something of the steel in which he lived. The Associated Press report was long in those days, and the paper was filled with local news of wars and rumours of wars, so that when

the call for troops came in the early spring, the town was eager for it, and David could not wait for the local company to form, but went to Lawrence and enlisted with the Twentieth Kansas. He was our first war-hero for thirty years, and the town was proud of him. Most of the town knew why he went, and there was reproach for the blonde in the Racket Store, who had told the girls it would be in June and that they were going East for a wedding trip.

When David came back from Lawrence an enlisted man, with a week in which to prepare for the fray, the Imperial Club gave him a farewell dance of great pride, in that one end of Imperial Hall was decorated for the occasion with all the Turkish rugs, and palms, and ferns, and piano-lamps with red shades, and American flags draped from the electric fixtures, and all the cut-glass and hand-painted punch-bowls that the girls of the T. T. T. Club could beg or borrow; and red lemonade and raspberry sherbet flowed like water. Whereat David Lewis was so pleased that he grew tearful when he came into the hall and saw the splendour that had been made for him. But his soul, despite his gratitude to the boys and girls who gave the party, was filled with an unutterable sadness; and he sat out many dances under the red lamp-shades with the various girls who had been playing sister to him; and the boys to whom the girls were more than sisters were not jealous.

As for the blonde, she beamed and preened and smiled on David, but her name was not on his card, and as the silk-salesman was on the road, she had many vacant lines on her programme, and she often sat alone by a card-table shuffling the deck that lay there. The boy's eyes were dead when they looked at her and her smile did not coax him to her. Once when the others were dancing an extra David sat across the room from her, and she went to him and sat by him, and said under the music:

"I thought we were always going to be friends—David?" And after he had parried her for a while, he rose to go away, and she said: "Won't you dance just once with me, Dave, just for old sake's sake before you go?" And he put down his name for the next extra and thought of how long it had been since the last June dance. Old sake's sake with youth may mean something that happened only day before yesterday.

The boy did not speak to his partner during the next dance but went about debating something in his mind; and when the number was ended he tripped over to the leader of the orchestra, whom he had hired for dances a score of times, and asked for "Love's Golden Dream Is Past" as the next "extra." It was his waltz and he didn't care if the whole town knew it—they would dance it together. And so when the orchestra began he started away, a very heart-broken, brown-eyed, olive-skinned little Welshman, who barely touched the finger-tips of a radiant, overdeveloped blonde with roses in her cheeks and moonlight in her hair. She would have come closer to him but he danced away and only hunted for her soul with his brown Celtic eyes. And because David had asked for it and they loved the boy, the old men in the orchestra played the waltz over and over again, and at the end the dancers clapped their hands for an encore, and when the chorus began they sang it dancing, and the boy found the voice which cheered the "Men of Harlech," the sweet, cadent voice of his race, and let out his heart in the words.

When he led her to a seat, the blonde had tears on her eyelashes as she choked a "good-by, Dave" to him, but he turned away without answering her and went to find his next partner. It was growing late and the crowd soon went down the long, dark stairway leading from Imperial Hall, into the moonlight and down the street, singing and humming and whistling "Love's Golden Dream," and the next day they and the town and the band came down to the noon train to see the conquering hero go.

It was lonesome in the office after David went, and his music-box in the corner was dumb, for we couldn't find the brass lever for it, though the printers and the reporters hunted in his trunk and in every place they could think of. But the lonesomest things in the world for him were the machines. The big press grew sulky and kept breaking the web, and his linotype took to absorbing castor-oil as if it were a kind of hasheesh. The new operator could run the new machine, but David's seemed to resent familiarity. It was six months before we got things going straight after he left us.

He wrote us soldier letters from the Presidio, and from mid-ocean, and from the picket-line in front of Manila. One afternoon the messenger-boy came in snuffling with a sheet of the Press-report. David's name was among the killed. Then we turned the column rules on the first page and got out the paper early to give the town the news. Henry Larmy brought in an obituary, the next day, which needed much editing, and we printed it under the head "A Tribute from a Friend," and signed Larmy's name to it.

The boy had no kith or kin—which is most unusual for a Welshman—and so, except in our office, he seemed to be forgotten. A month went by, the season changed, and changed again, and a year was gone, when the Government sent word to Larmy—whom the boy seemed to have named for his next friend—that David's body would be brought back for burial if his friends desired it. So in the fall of 1900, when the Presidential campaign was at its height, the conquering hero came home, and we gave him a military funeral. The body came to us on Labor Day, and in our office we consecrated the day to David. The band and the militia company took him from the big stone church where sometimes he had gone to Sunday-school as a child, and a long procession of townsfolk wound around the hill to the cemetery, where David received a salute of guns, and the bugler played taps, and our eyes grew wet and our hearts were touched. Then we covered him with flowers, whipped up the horses and came back to the world.

That night, as it was at the end of a holiday, the Republican Committee had assigned to our town, for the benefit of the men in the shops, one of the picture-shows that Mark Hanna, like a heathen in his blindness, had sent to Kansas, thinking our State, after the war, needed a spur to its patriotism in the election. The crowd in front of the post-office was a hundred feet wide and two hundred feet long, looking at the pictures from the kinetoscope—pictures of men going to work in mills and factories; pictures of the troops unloading on the coast of Cuba; pictures of the big warships sailing by; pictures of Dewey's flagship coming up the Hudson to its glory; pictures of the Spanish ships lying crushed in Manila harbour.

Larmy and the reporter were sitting kicking their heels on the stone steps of the post-office opposite the screen on which the pictures were flickering. Some they saw and others they did not notice, for their talk was of David and of the strange things he had shown to them.

"How did you ever fix it up in your mind?" asked Larmy.

"I didn't fix it up. He was too many for me," was the reporter's answer.

"The little rooster couldn't have faked it up?" questioned Larmy.

"No—but he might have hypnotised us—or something."

"Yes—but still, he might have been hypnotised by something himself," suggested Larmy, and then added: "That thing he did with the linotype—say, wasn't that about the limit? And yet nothing has come of that prophecy. That's the trouble. I've seen dozens of those things, and they always just come up to the edge of proving themselves, but always jump back. There is always–"

"My God, Larmy, look—look!" cried the reporter.

And the two men looked at the screen before them, just as the backward sway of the crowd had ceased and horror was finding a gasping voice upon the lips of the women; for there, walking as naturally as life, out of the background of the picture, came David Lewis with his dark sleeves rolled up, his peaked army hat on the back of his head, a bucket in his hand, and as he stopped and grinned at the crowd—between the lightning-flashes of the kinetoscope—they could see him wave his free hand. He stood there while a laugh covered his features, and he put his hand in his pocket and drew out a key-ring, which he waved, holding it by some long, stemlike instrument. Then he snapped back into nothing.

And the operator of the machine, being in a hurry to catch the ten-thirty train, went on with his picture-show and gave us President McKinley and Mark Hanna sitting on the front steps of the home in Canton, then followed the photograph of the party around the big table signing the treaty

of peace. As the crowd loosened and dissolved, Larmy and the reporter stood silently waiting. Then, when they could get away together, the reporter said:

"Come, let's go over to the shop and think about this thing."

When they opened the office door, the rank odour of the machinery came to them with sickening force. They left the front door open and raised the windows. The reporter began using a chisel on the top of a little box with a Government frank on it, that had been placed upon the music-box in the corner.

"We may as well see what David sent home," he grunted, as he jerked at the stubborn nails, "anyway, I've got a theory."

Larmy was smoking hard. "Yes," he replied after a time; "we might as well open it now as any time. The letter said all his things would be found there. I guess he didn't have a great deal. Poor little devil, there was no one much to get things for but you fellows and maybe me, if he thought of us."

By this time the box was opened, and the reporter was scooping things out upon the floor. There was an army uniform, that had something clinky in the pockets, and wrapped in a magenta silk handkerchief was a carved piece of ivory. In a camera plate-box was a rose, faded and crumbly, a chip-diamond ring, a bangle bracelet, a woman's glove and a photograph. These Larmy looked at as he smoked. They meant nothing to him, but the reporter dived into the clothes for the clinky things. He came up with a bunch of keys, and on it was the long brass lever which unlocked the music in the box.

"Here," he said as he jingled the keys, "is the last link in our chain." And he rose and went over to the box, uncovered it, and jabbed in the lever with a nervous hand. There was a rolling and clinking inside. Then, slowly, a harmony rose, and the tinkling that came from the box resolved itself into a melody that filled the room. It was strong and clear and powerful, and seemed to have a certain passion in it that may have been struck like flint fire from the time and the place and the spirit of the occasion. The two men stared dumbly as they listened. The sound rose stronger and stronger; over and over again the song repeated itself; then very gently its strength began to fail; and finally it sank into a ghostly tinkle that still carried the melody till it faded into silence.

"That," said the reporter, "is the song that was in his heart—'Love's Golden Dream.' I'm satisfied."

"The last link," shuddered Larmy. "That which seemed corporeal has melted 'as a breath into the wind.'"

The reporter shovelled the debris into the box, pushed it under a desk, and the two men hurried to close the office. As they stood on the threshold a moment, while the reporter clicked the key in the lock, a paper rustled and they heard a mouse scamper across the floor inside the empty room.

"Let's go home," shivered Larmy. They started north, which was the short way home, but Larmy took hold of his companion's arm and said: "No, let's go this way: there's an electric light here on the corner, and it's dark down there."

And so they turned into the white, sputtering glare and walked on without words.

V
The Coming of the Leisure Class

We all are workers in our town, as people are in every small town. It is always proper to ask what a man does for a living with us, for none of us has money enough to live without work, and until the advent of Beverly Amidon, our leisure class consisted of Red Martin, the gambler, the only man in town with nothing to do in the middle of the day; and the black boys who loafed on the south side of the bank building through the long afternoons until it was time to deliver the clothes which their wives and mothers had washed. Everyone else in town works, and, excepting an occasional picnic, there is no social activity among the men until after sundown. But five years ago Beverly Amidon came to town, and brought with him a large leisure and a taste for society which made him easily the "glass of fashion and the mould of form" not only in our little community, but all over this part of the State. Beverly and his mother, who had come to make their home with her sister, in one of the big houses on the hill, had money. How much, we had no idea. In a small town when one has "money" no one knows just how much or how little, but it must be over fifteen thousand dollars, otherwise one is merely "well fixed."

And brought with him a large leisure and a taste for society

But Beverly was a blessing to our office. We never could have filled the society column Saturday without him, for he was a continuous social performance. He was the first man in town who dared to wear a flannel tennis suit on the streets, and he was a whole year ahead of the other boys with his Panama hat. It was one of those broad-brimmed Panamas, full of heart-interest, that made him look like a romantic barytone, and when under that gala façade he came tripping into the office in his white duck clothes, with a wide Windsor tie, Miss Larrabee, the society editor, who was the only one of us with whom he ever had any business, would pull the string that unhooked the latch of the gate to her section of the room and say, without looking up: "Come into the garden, Maud." To which he made invariable reply: "Oh, Miss Larrabee, don't be so sarcastic! I have a little item for you."

The little item was always an account of one of his social triumphs. And there was a long list of them to his credit. He introduced ping-pong; he gave us our first "pit party"; he held the first barn dance given in the county; his was our first "tacky party"; and he gave the first progressive buggy ride the young people had ever enjoyed, and seven girls afterward confessed that on the evening of that affair he hadn't been in the buggy with them five minutes before he began driving with one hand—and his right hand at that. Still, when the crowd assembled for supper at Flat Rock, the girls didn't hold his left handiwork against him, and they admitted that he was just killing when he put on one of their hats and gave an imitation of a girl from Bethany College who had been visiting in town

the week before. Beverly was always the life of the company. He could make three kinds of salad dressing, two kinds of lobster Newburgh and four Welsh rarebits, and was often the sole guest of honour at the afternoon meetings of the T. T. T. girls, before whom he was always willing to show his prowess. Sometimes he gave chafing-dish parties whereat he served ginger ale and was real devilish.

He used to ride around the country bare-headed with two or three girls when honest men were at work, and he acquired a fine leather-coloured tan. He tried organising a polo club, but the ponies from the delivery waggons that were available after six o'clock did not take training well, and he gave up polo. In making horse-back riding a social diversion he taught a lot of fine old family buggy horses a number of mincing steps, so that thereafter they were impossible in the family phaeton. He thereby became unpopular with a number of the heads of families, and he had to introduce bridge whist in the old married set to regain their favour. This cost him the goodwill of the preachers, and he gave a Japanese garden party for the Epworth League to restore himself in the church where he was accustomed to pass the plate on Sundays. Miss Larrabee used to call him the first aid to the ennuied. But the Young Prince, who chased runaways teams and wrote personal items, never referred to him except as "Queen of the Hand-holders." For fun we once printed Beverly Amidon's name among those present at a Mothers' League meeting, and it was almost as much of a hit in the town as the time we put the words, "light refreshments were served and the evening was spent in cards and dancing," at the close of an account of a social meeting of the Ministerial Alliance.

The next time Beverly brought in his little item he stopped long enough to tell us that he thought that the people who laughed at our obvious mistake in the list of guests of the Mothers' League were rather coarse. One word brought on two, and as it was late in the afternoon, and the paper was out, we bade Beverly sit down and tell us the story of his life, and his real name; for Miss Larrabee had declared a dozen times that Beverly Amidon sounded so much like a stage name that she was willing to bet that his real name was Jabez Skaggs.

Beverly's greatest joy was in talking about his social conquests in Tiffin, Ohio; therefore he soon was telling us that there was so much culture in Tiffin, such a jolly lot of girls, so many pleasant homes, and a most extraordinary atmosphere of refinement. He rattled along, telling us what great sport they used to have running down to Cleveland for theatre-parties, and how easy it was to 'phone to Toledo and get the nicest crowd of boys one could wish to come over to the parties, and how Tiffin was famous all over that part of Ohio for its exclusive families and its week-end house-parties.

The Young Prince sat by listening for a time and then got up and leaned over the railing around Miss Larrabee's desk. Beverly was confiding to us how he got up the sweetest living pictures you ever saw and took them down to Cleveland, where they made all kinds of money for the King's Daughters. He told what gorgeous costumes the girls wore and what stunning backgrounds he rigged up. The Young Prince winked at Miss Larrabee as he straightened up and started for the door. Then he let fly: "Were you Psyche at the Pool in that show, or a Mellin's Food Baby?"

But Beverly deigned no reply and a little later in the conversation remarked that the young men in this town were very bad form. He thought that he had seen some who were certainly not gentlemen. He really didn't see how the young ladies could endure to have such persons in their set. He confided to Miss Larrabee that at a recent lawn-party he had come upon a young man, who should be nameless, with his arm about a young woman's waist.

"And, Miss Larrabee," continued Beverly in his solemnest tones, "A young man who will put his arm around a girl will go further—yes, Miss Larabee—much further. He will kiss her!" Whereat he nodded his head and shook it at the awful thought.

Miss Larrabee drew in a shocked breath and gasped:

"Do you really think so, Mr. Amidon? I couldn't imagine such a thing!"

He had a most bedizened college fraternity pin, which he was forever lending to the girls. During his first year in town, Miss Larrabee told us, at least a dozen girls had worn the thing. Wherefore she used to call it the Amidon Loan Exhibit.

He introduced golf into our town, and was able to find six men to join his fifteen young ladies in the ancient sport. Two preachers, a young dentist and three college professors were the only male creatures who dared walk across our town in plaid stockings and knickerbockers, and certainly it hurt their standing at the banks, for the town frowned on golf, and confined its sport to baseball in the summer, football in the autumn, and checkers in the winter.

That was a year ago. In the autumn something happened to Beverly, and he had to go to work. There was nothing in our little town for him, so he went to Kansas City. He did not seem to "make it" socially there, for he wrote to the girls that Kansas City was cold and distant and that everything was ruled by money. He explained that there were some nice people, but they did not belong to the fast set. He was positively shocked, he wrote, at what he heard of the doings at the Country Club—so different from the way things went in Tiffin, Ohio.

For a long time we did not hear his name mentioned in the office. Finally there came a letter addressed to Miss Larrabee. In it Beverly said that he had found his affinity. "She is not rich," he admitted, "but," he added, "she belongs to an old, aristocratic, Southern family, through reduced circumstances living in retirement; very exclusive, very haughty. I have counted it a privilege to be constantly associated with people of such rare distinction. Her mother is a grand dame of the old school who has opened her home to a few choice paid guests who feel, as I do, that it is far more refreshing socially to partake of the gracious hospitality of her secluded home than to live in the noisy, vulgar hotels of the city. It was in this relation at her mother's home that I met the woman who is to join her lot with mine." Thereafter followed the date and place of the wedding, a description of the bride's dress, an account of her lineage back to the "Revolutionary Georgia Governor of that name," and fifty cents in stamps for extra papers containing an account of the wedding.

In time we hope to teach our young men to roll down their shirt-sleeves in the summer, our girls to wear their hats, our horses to quit prancing in the shafts of the family buggy. In time bridge whist will wear itself out, in time our social life will resume its old estate, and the owners of the five dress-suits in town will return to their former distinction. In time caste lines set by the advent of the leisure class will be obliterated, and it will be no longer bad form for the dry-goods clerk to dance with the grocery clerk's wife at the Charity Ball. But, come what may, we shall always know that there was a time in the social history of our town when we danced the two-step as they dance it in Tiffin, Ohio, and wore knee-breeches and plaid stockings, and quit work at four o'clock. Those were great days—"the glory that was Greece, the grandeur that was Rome."

VI
The Bolton Girl's "Position"

When she said she would like to "accept a position" with our paper, it was all over between us. After that we knew that she was at least highly improbable if not entirely impossible. But then we might have expected as much from a girl who called herself Maybelle. There is, however, this much to be said in Maybelle's favour: she was persistent. She did not let go till it thundered! We could have stood it well enough if she had limited her campaign for a job on the paper to an occasional call at the office. But she had a fiendish instinct which told her who were the friends we liked most to oblige: the banker, for instance, who carried our overdrafts, the leading advertiser, the chairman of the printing committee of the town council—and she found ways to make them ask if we couldn't do something for Miss Bolton. She could teach school; indeed, she had a place in the Academy. But she loathed school-teaching. She had always felt that, if she could once get a start, she could make a name for herself.

She had written something that she called "A Critique on Hamlet," which she submitted to us, and was deeply pained when we told her that we didn't care for editorial matter; that what our paper needed was the names of the people in our own country town and county, printed as many times a day or a week or a month as they could be put into type. We tried to tell her that more important to us than the influence of the Celtic element on our national life and literature was the fact that John Jones of Lebo—that is to say, red John, as distinguished from black John—or Jones the tinner, or Jones of the Possum Holler settlement was in town with a load of hay. "Other papers," we explained carefully, while she looked as sympathetic and intelligent as a collie, "other papers might be interested in the radio-activity of uranium X; they might care to print articles on the psychological phenomena of mobs"—to which she snapped eager agreement with her eyes—"others, with entire propriety, might be interested in inorganic evolution"—and she cheeped "yes, yes" with feverish intensity—"but in our little local paper we cared only for the person who could tell our readers with the most delicacy and precision how many spoons Mrs. Worthington had to borrow for her party, who had the largest number of finger-bowls in town, what Mrs. Conklin paid for the broilers she served at her party last February, and the name of the country woman who raised them, and why it was that all the women failed to make Jennie's recipe for sunshine cake work when they tried it." Such are the things that interest our people, and he, she or it who can turn in two or three columns a day of items setting forth these things in a good-natured way, so that the persons mentioned will only grin and wonder who told it, is good for ten dollars of our money every Saturday night.

Maybelle thought it was such interesting work, and her eyes floated in tears of happiness at the thought of such joy. If she could only have a chance! It would be just lovely—simply grand, and she knew she could do it! Something in her innermost soul thrilled with a tintinabulation that made her quiver with anticipation. Whereupon she went out and came back in three days with five sheets of foolscap on which she had written an article beginning: "When Memory draws aside the curtains of her magic chamber, revealing the pictures meditation paints, and we see through the windows of our dreams the sweet vale of yesterday, lying outside and beyond; when stern Ambition, with relentless hand, turns us away from all this to ride in the sombre chariot of Duty—then it is that entrancing Pleasure beckons us back to sit by Memory's fire and sip our tea with Maiden meditation." What it was all about no one ever found out; but the Young Prince at the local desk who read it clear through said that sometimes he thought that it was a report of a fire and at other times it seemed like a dress-goods catalogue. It would have made four columns. As he put the roll back in the drawer the Young Prince rose and paced grandly out. At the front door he stopped and said: "You'll never make anything

out of her—she's a handholder! When a girl begins to get corns on her hands, I notice she has mush on the brain!"

Sometimes he thought it was a report of a fire and at other times it seemed like a dress-goods catalogue

But Maybelle returned, and we went all over the same ground again. We explained that what we wanted was short items—two or three lines each—little references to home doings; something telling who has company, who is sick, who is putting shingles on the barn or an "L" on the house. And she said "Oh, yes!" so passionately that it seemed as though she would bark or put her front feet on the table. One felt like taking her jaws in his hands and pulling her ears.

The next time she came in she said that if we would just try her—give her something to do—she was sure she could show us how well she could do it. On a venture, and partly to get rid of her, we sent her to the district convention of the Epworth League to write up the opening meeting. About noon of the next day she brought in three sermons, and said that she didn't get the list of officers nor the names of the choir because they were all people who lived here and everyone knew them. Then we explained in short, simple sentences that the sermons were of no value, and that the names were what we desired. She dropped her eyes and said meekly "Oh!" and told us how sorry she was. Also she said that if it wasn't for a meeting of the T. T. T. girls that afternoon she would go back and get the names. When she went out, the Young Prince, sitting by the window with his pencil behind his ear and his feet on the table, said: "I bet she can make the grandest fudge!" "And such lovely angel food," put in Miss Larrabee, who was busy writing up the Epworth League convention.

Miss Bolton's name was always among the lists we printed of the guests at the Entre Nous Card Club, the Imperial Dancing Club, the "Giddy Young Things" Club, the Art Club and the Shakespeare Club. But when she came to the office she was full of anxiety at the frivolity of society. She said that she so longed for intellectual companionship that she felt sometimes as if she must fly to a place where she could find a soul that would feel in unison with the infinite that thrilled her being. Far be it from her to wish to coin the pulsations of her soul, but papa and mamma did need her help so. She accented papa and mamma on the last syllable and leaned forward and looked upward like a shirtwaist Madonna. But writing locals someway didn't appeal to her. She wondered if we could use a serial story. And then she went on: "Oh, I have some of the sweetest things in my head! I know I could write them. They just tingle through my blood like wine. I know I could write them—such sublime things—but when I sit down to put them on paper something always comes up that prevents my going on with them. There are dozens whirling through my brain begging to be written. There is one about the earl who has imprisoned the young princess in a dungeon, and her lover, a knight of the cross, comes home from a crusade and is put in the cell next to her. A bird that she has been feeding through her prison window takes a lock of her golden hair to the window where her lover is looking out across the beautiful world, not knowing that she, too, has fallen into the earl's clutches.

And, oh, yes! there is another about Cornelia who lived in a moated tower, and all the dukes and lords and kings in the land had laid suit to her hand, and she could find none who came up to her highest ideal, so she set them a task—and, oh, a lot more about what they did; I haven't thought that out—but anyway she married the red duke Wolfang who spurned her task and took her by night with his retainers away from the tower, saying her love was his Holy Grail and to get her was the object of his pilgrimage. Oh, it's just grand."

No, we don't use serials and when we do we buy them in stereotyped plates by the pound. This made Miss Bolton droop, with another disappointed "Oh." The grain of the world seems so coarse when one looks at it closely.

We did not see Miss Bolton at the office for a long time after the duke abducted the lady in the moated grange, but we received a poem signed M. B. "To Dan Cupid," and another on "My Heart of Fire." Also there came an anonymous communication in strangely familiar fat vertical handwriting to the effect that "some people in this town think that if a young lady has a gentleman friend call on her more than twice a week it is their business to assume a courtship. They should know that there are souls on this earth whose tendrils reach into the infinite beyond the gross materiality of this mundane sphere to a destiny beyond the stars." At the bottom of the page were the words: "Please publish and oblige a subscriber."

The next that we heard of Miss Bolton was that she was running pink and blue baby-ribbon through her white things, and was expecting a linen shower from the T. T. T. girls, a silver shower from the "Giddy Young Things," a handkerchief shower from the Entre Nous girls, and a kitchen shower from the Imperial Club. Miss Larrabee, the society editor, began to hate Miss Bolton with the white-hot hate which all society editors turn on all brides. Miss Larrabee was authority for the statement that Maybelle had used five hundred yards of baby-ribbon—pink and blue and white and yellow—in her trousseau, and that she was bestowing the same passionate fervour on her hemstitching and tucking that she had wasted on literature; that she was helping papa and mamma by shouldering the biggest wedding on them since the Tomlinsons went into bankruptcy after their firework ceremonial. Miss Larrabee said that Papa Bolton's livery-stable was burning up so fast that she wanted to call out the fire department, and that Mamma Bolton made her think of the patent-medicine testimonials we printed from "poor tired women."

The day of the wedding the blow came. A very starched-up little boy with strawberry juice frescoed around his mouth brought in a note from Maybelle and a tightly-rolled manuscript tied with blue baby-ribbon. In the note she said that she thought it would be so romantic to "write up her own wedding—recalling the dear, dead days when she was a neophyte in letters." We handed the manuscript to Miss Larrabee, from whom, as she read, came snorts: "'Drawing-room!' Huh! 'Music-room.' Heavens to Betsy! 'Peculiar style of beauty!' Oh, joy! 'Looked like a wood-nymph in the morn.' Wouldn't that saturate you! 'The Apollo-like beauty of the groom.'" Miss Larrabee groaned as she rose, and putting her raincoat on the floor by her chair she exclaimed: "Do you people know what I am going to do? I have got to lie right down here and have a fit!"

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.