

Home Town Sketches

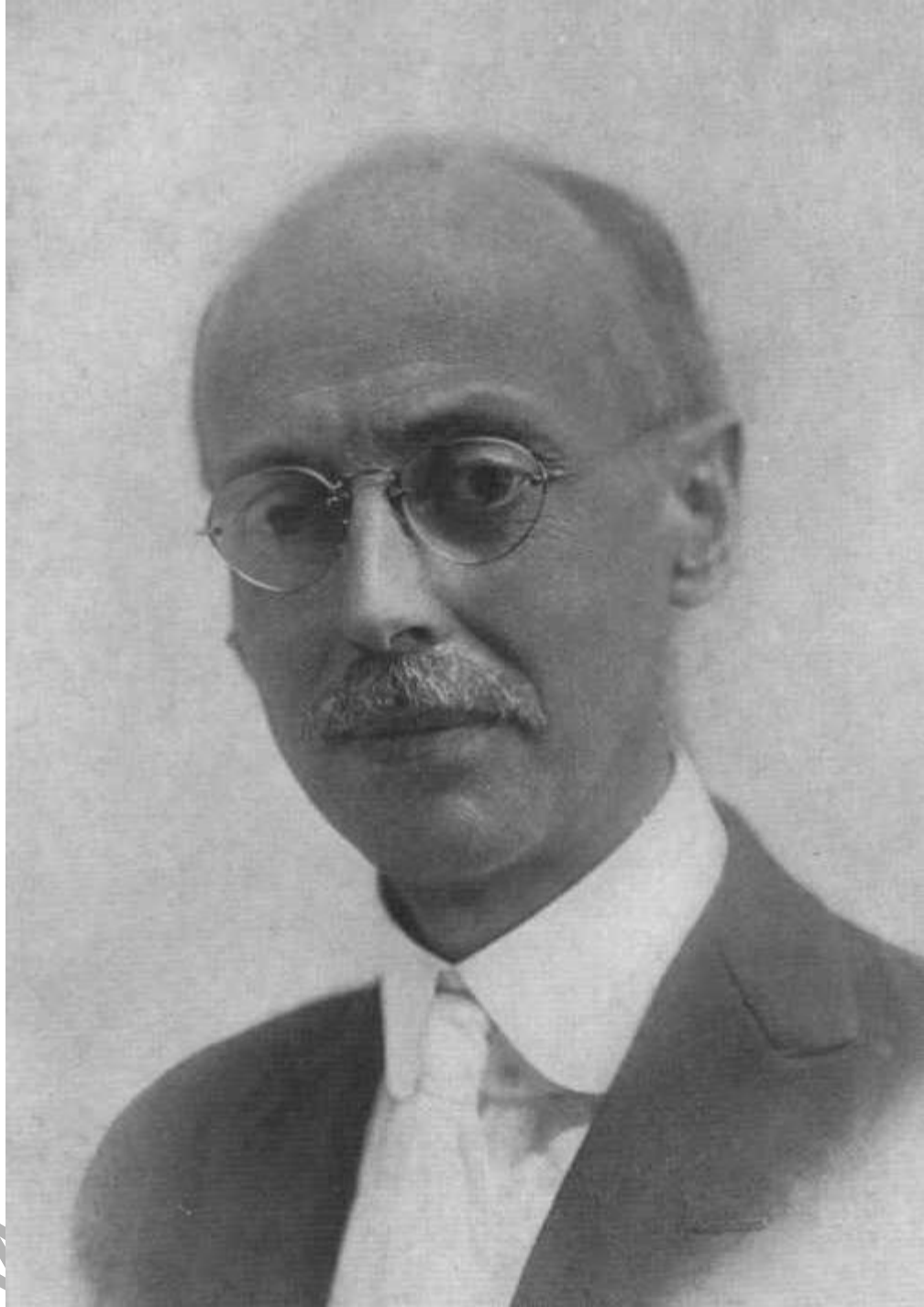
By

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thousands of converts who still cherish in their hearts his many efforts. Do you recall the yearly recital - lectures of Edward Baxter Perry? Did you think that they paid their way? No, there was an annual deficit which was cheerfully made up by Gus Sauter and his brother Fred, who also did a great deal for music. I think the Sauters finally convinced us that music was as important in our lives as corn and hogs, or even as mules.

We have passed through the period of existence when culture was thought non-essential. We have our clubs and our endowed sources of information and the dissemination thereof. No one now doubts the fact that without beauty in our lives we may not survive as men. We no longer ask as our test question, "Will it bake bread?" Too long have we required the utility which has all but thrown our classics out of college. "Of what use is Greek?" asked a businesslike young man of his college professor, and the old Prof. threw back his head and raised his hands on high as he answered, "Of no use, thank God!" He dared say that today - ten years ago he might have lost his job for that answer.

For we must learn that music, painting, sculpture, architecture, poetry and other literature are worth while in themselves, not for the bread they

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bake. Life is possible without culture, the hog proves it. The sun, the moon, the stars wheeled overhead for a million years before man even wondered at their meaning, and as soon as he began wondering culture dawned and man could be distinguished from the beast of the field by other attributes than having two legs.

Has Prof. Sauter bent his technical skill to bring him the moneys as are requisite for a comfortable life? I am glad to record the fact that he has and that Boonville will not have to pass the hat for the means with which to sustain him in his old age, and that is a compliment to Boonville in that her prophet is not without honor even in his own country, for we generally have to change that little word "even" to read "except"-and what a difference it makes!

How Come?

I am asked frequently how I came to write these sketches and when do I find time to do them. For the first, it was at the suggestion of Dean Williams. We were talking over Bates and his sorghum, Mrs. Beck and her gingerbread, Captain Baird and his umbrella, Maddox and his profanity, etc., when Mr. Williams asked, "Why not

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write about those characters? I'm sure it would be interesting. Try out a bunch and send an installment to the Advertiser."

So I did, and Editor Nelson pronounced them good. I wrote ten installments which met with such flattering reception that I got out ten more. I received letters of commendation from people I hardly knew. Many, of course, from those I knew well. But from many that I naturally expected would write me immediately I have not heard at all. Thus is the fact exemplified that it is also a topsy-turvy world, my masters!

As for the time - on the street cars, suburban trains, at odd times in general. Once I was awakened from a sound sleep by a reminiscence that had been fermenting in my mind for

some days. It was now completely formed and I got no rest until I got up and wrote it out. Doubtless you suspected that there was something weird about many of them. Well, now you know.

His Honor, Mayor O'Bryan

Col. John L. O'Bryan was an old time mayor of Boonville and no one who had known the Colonel could ever forget him. He had presence and you instinctively classed him as a personage.

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A large man, clad in Prince Albert coat with a tall silk hat he was an impressive figure at public functions. His son, John, was for many years a compositor on the Advertiser. Col. O'Bryan's daughter, Fanny, was a belle of Boonville. She was married to Leopold Walz, whom everybody knows - and likes.

Do It Now!

It is exceptional for memory to begin before the age of five. If you want to live in the memory of the coming generation, begin doing your kindly acts to those of that age.

Now there was Marion Benedict. At my very earliest period of recollection, he fixed himself for life in my memory. Did he have a store on Main Street at or near Waterman's, later, clothing store? Well, anyway, Marion Benedict picked me up by the feet one day and dipped me into a barrel of ginger-snaps, saying: "Now grab a double handful!" I came up with two hands full and one between my teeth!

Nobody Home

Who that ever knew Dr. L. Hurt can forget

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that vivid personality? The doctor's hobby was fox hunting and the exceeding great pleasure he derived from that sport enabled him, as he often said, to endure the gruelling life of a hardworking country doctor. One night Dr. Hurt had a double duty to perform, make a sick call on horseback to the country and then to join a fox hunting party which had rendezvous a few miles from Boonville. In order to save a trip back home, he took with him his famous hunting horn whose resonant blare could be heard for miles.

Passing along the country roadside, Dr. Hurt heard a Voice raised in supplication and upon investigation he found that it issued from the cabin of the old negro voodoo doctor, Guinea Sam. Dismounting, the doctor made his way to the cabin and looking through the lighted window he saw the ancient negro upon his knees, his hands raised on high and the

tears streaming down his withered cheeks. The words poured out in an earnestness not to be doubted.

"Oh, Lord! I'se old and forsaken; my roots is laid, my branches is withered without no leaves hanging on to them. I'se served so many yeahs I done lost count. Take old Sambo home, oh Lord, he is so tired of a-waitin' and weary ob dis wicked worl'. I'se ready, Lord, I'se ready and

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I longs to hear dat blessed trumpet of yo' angel Gabriel!"

Dr. Hurt raised his hunting horn to his lips and blew a blast that might have razed the walls of Jericho. "Who-who dat?" quavered Guinea Sam, quickly blowing out his lamp. "The angel Gabriel come after Guinea Sam!" intoned the doctor. "Guinea Sam, he-he don' live heah no more, sah, he done moved away er long time ago!"

Cholera in Boonville

Do you remember the Bedwell family who lived south of the old Court House and whose marble monument yard extended to Morgan Street? The cholera played havoc in that family in the early '70's. I remember the town was in a panic at the time and the doctors were burning tar on the street corners of the Bedwell place in the vague hope of keeping off the contagion.

It was a crude beginning, this fighting infection and contagion, about as efficacious as the Chinese method of fighting disease with hideous masks and fireworks; but in those days we had very misty ideas as to causation of disease - it's a wonder any of the seriously sick survived.

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Mrs. Bedwell had been nursing relatives across the river who were fatally ill with an unknown disease that proved to be cholera. The physician in charge had ordered all clothing to be destroyed, but Mrs. Bedwell brought the clothing to Boonville and laundered it, became acutely ill the next day and was dead before night. Other members of the family followed in quick succession.

No nurses could be hired and I remember my mother going daily to this stricken home. The only precaution she took was to come home by way of the barn and change her dress there before coming to her own small children.

What became of the son George ("Clell") Bedwell? Mr. B. was an easy mark for even those spacious days. His stable was always full of country horses on full rations, and his house of country folks, also on full rations. The good old man simply could not refuse them hospitality so he was "eaten out of house and home."

Lawyers, Preachers and Doctors

Do lawyers know that we are all afraid of them? One bad lawyer, morally bad, I mean, can prejudice two generations against the whole profession. Somehow the non-litigative citizen, and

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that means most of us, dreads to "get into a lawyer's hands" with an exceeding great dread. Is it because so many stories are written with sharp practice as the theme? It is not the right spirit; the lawyer should be our guide and friend for we are in dire need of both in threading the mazes of the law.

I think preachers (I like that old-fashioned word) should be required to take a course with the law breaking element just as the young doctor must take one in the slums and hospitals. Social Service should be his clinic. Mingling as he does with good, orderly people of his congregation his advice in every day problems is apt to be impracticable, too rigid and not in accord with the laws of biology which actuate the urge of human cussedness. At least it has appeared so to me.

Some keen observer has said that there are two kinds of doctors. Some doctors know a great deal and say very little about it, others know very little and say a great deal about it. I have observed that the latter is apt to have the more patients. To be sure he does not keep them long but that is no cause for worry as there is "one born every minute" anyway.

No doctor is very happy, his work does not admit of it. 'Tis said the doctor's smile is kindly;

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yes, all sad men smile in a kind way. You see the doctor has to do with life, which is itself sad. If he cares too much he does not live long. If he does not care enough he lives too long-for the good of humanity. If you have not read a note of melancholy in my writing it is because I am only three-quarters doctor-which is plenty, when you come to think about it.

I wonder if Col. John Cosgrove is still the silver-tongued orator? How we boys loved to listen to those beautiful words of which he was so lavish. We wondered how judge Edwards could decide against any client for whom Col. Cosgrove pled.

I never heard Emmet Hayden or Tom Wright plead in court but they had the reputation of profound legal ability. "Jimmy" Johnston we greatly admired, especially after the trial of John I. West. Judge Draffen we considered a great legal Mogul and Judge Wm. M. Williams, his strong right arm.

No doubt Bob Evans is now known as Dr. Robert Evans. There was a hard worker and always on the job. Did not Dr. P. L. Hurt resemble Roosevelt lot of drive in him in many respects? He had lot of drive in him and he drove, all right - a team all over Cooper and Howard counties, sometimes

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for twenty-four hours a day during an epidemic. No one could forget a man who looks as wise as does Dr. Richard Holman, who now practices in St. Louis, and no one could possibly be as wise as Dick Holman looks, either, and that is no reflection on his cerebral convolutions-if I make my meaning manifest. I see Dr. Richard about once in three years and always wish it was thrice in one year when I do meet him.

I see the Rev. J. J. Wilkins on the streets of St. Louis quite frequently but he does not recognize me. He looks astonishingly as he did so many years ago when he was rector of the Episcopal church in Boonville. Didn't he succeed the gentle, white-haired Curtis? If memory serves me, Mr. Wilkins was followed by the unconventional Rev. Henry Tauro Bray; yes, I know you think I got that middle name wrong - but did I? Think it over.

The venerable and Rev. Mr. Charles was early fixed in my mind by those two bad boys of his, Ben and J. W. I did not know them at all, but from what I heard about the lads they must have been mischievous little devils. Dr. J. W. Charles is now a prominent oculist and Ben is equally renowned as a lawyer, both in St. Louis.

The Rev. C. M. Hawkins was a devil. Perhaps

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I had better qualify that and say he was a printer's devil, which may be "something else again," Potashly speaking. He was always welcome at the Advertiser office and the printers were so glad when he left, for strong language must be used occasionally in a printery.

Did not the Rev. A. Machette have some peaches on his family tree? I hear the chorus "I'll say he had" and "peaches is right!" While the English is open to criticism, it serves. Mr. Machette was succeeded by Rev. M. E. Broadus, a militant clergyman full of energy and zeal. He gave me the impression that, rather than beg you to come to church, he would prefer to take you by the scruff of the neck and souse you under the water in baptism with an injunction, "Now, blast you, you are a Christian - and don't forget it, either!"

"Whitewash Laura"

There lives in Boonville an ancient colored woman of a type almost as nearly extinct as the mastodon and dinosaur. She is known affectionately to the older inhabitants as

"Whitewash Laura," from her proficiency in the art of whitewashing. Her tall, angular figure but little bowed

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by her great age, is a familiar sight on the streets in fine weather.

Laura Lacenberry-Jackson has a good memory which runs back to the dark, sad days of slavery. She was brought up by Mr. and Mrs. Samuel Wooldridge on their farm long before they moved to Boonville and she recalls the time when slave buyers came to the Wooldridge farm, looking for "likely niggers." But never a fear touched Laura's heart. She knew that her adored master and mistress would never sell any of their slaves, so she paraded her good points teasingly before the slavers with the utmost confidence in her security. Had she heard the tempting figures offered for her possession and could have understood her value in money, she might have been more discreet.

Being a clever worker with her hands and most agile, Laura was too valuable to be sent to the fields, so was kept for household duties. In due time she was married and had the distinction of a regular church wedding in a white dress and veil, with Mr. and Mrs. Wooldridge and other quality folks present.

Laura's husband claimed the prerogative of periodically "beating up" his wife. Strangely enough she objected to this primitive method of

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preserving and enhancing conjugal affection. One by one are we males losing our privileges - Laura actually secured a divorce on grounds of cruelty, having the distinction of being the first colored woman in Cooper County to obtain a decree.

Some years later, Laura annexed a steamboat negro named Jackson, but the task of keeping him in the straight and narrow proved irksome and she was relieved when "he took his foot in his hand" and floated away on his beloved steamboat out of the memory of his fellow citizens.

Laura had a keen mind and her intuitions never failed her in placing quality folks - no "trash" could impose upon her, she unerringly sensed the social standing even of strangers. Among her race her orations or sermons always carried conviction, being characterized by good sense and fundamental truth.

This outstanding negress never made any claims to special virtues, being content to stand with her race, partaking of its weaknesses which the course of centuries will remove. She boasts that she has never been arrested, although she has not been known as a wall flower.

Laura was for years employed in the family of Sylvanus Young, who was formerly postmaster of Boonville. When Mrs. Young died, Laura

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was especially invited to the funeral and a carriage reserved for her. But this faithful servitor had her own idea as to what was due her former mistress. She hid herself in the gallery at the church service and humbly walked behind the hearse all the way to the cemetery, thus sacrificing her dramatic opportunity to the memory of one whom she loved.

One son was borne to Laura. Alas! The charity of silence is the mantle most appropriate to cover this unworthy child of an ambitious mother. He sleeps beneath a proper stone now and we must remember that he was the idol of his black mammy. Her boy could not be wholly bad.

Whitewash Laura has asked the daughter of her late mistress, whom we knew as Miss Nellie Young, to write something about her to be read over her casket when the final summons comes from Him who whitens all His children as He takes them. She is conscious of a clean life, as lives go-human nature being what it is-and she asks but one boon of St. Peter at the gate.

Understanding that there flows a milky river of whitewash in Paradise, she asks that a good brush be placed in her casket and she will claim as her reward the privilege of whitewashing the great,

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endless fence surrounding the celestial land and that she may keep white the tree trunks in His garden.

For some reason Nellie Young delegates to me the writing of these lines which may serve to make live a little longer the memory of Laura Lacenberry-Jackson, who did so many things well, but whose chief joy in life was to cover unsightly objects with that compound of all of God's colors, White. So well has she done her task, so much of this material has she used in her long and well spent life, that it will be small wonder if her soul emerges from her black body white as the driven snow!

The N. S. Cooking Club

A remarkable, and at that time unique, club was organized by the society girls of Boonville in 1884, the None Such Cooking Club, which became famous from coast to coast. We know now that the "cooking" part was camouflage to cover the deadly efficiency with which the girls operated among the young males, every one of whom actually enjoyed the process by which his particular goose was done to a turn.

An invitation to a Cooking Club affair was

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equivalent to a royal command-impossible to decline. When the young men appeared and came under the influence of the becomingly attired "cooks and waitresses," who knew only too well the shortest route to the masculine heart, what possible chance of escape was there? The first president of the club was Miss Josie Wear; vice president, Miss Laura Aehle. The secretary, Miss Grace Kemper; there was no need for a treasurer.

I believe one or two of the club members have chosen spinsterhood from motives of duty rather than from lack of opportunity. Indeed had polyandry prevailed in the community, each "cook" might have had at least two husbands. The organization consisted of twenty-five members and their "victims" include a governor, a congressman, judges, editors, lawyers, doctors and representatives of "big business." All succumbed to the irresistible charm of Boonville's young womanhood.

The precious records of the club's doings, the announcements of weddings inevitably following, the comments of the metropolitan papers on the "Nice Sweethearts Cooking Club" are preserved in twenty-five households of charming middle aged matrons, the most treasured possession of

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each. I wish I might print the names of all the members but I must refrain, as that would cause renewed heart burnings in the breasts of the oldish fellows who failed to win one of those "Nice Sweethearts."

The Gasconade Country

I hope that some day in the near future a master writer will be inspired to write of Missouri's Ozark mountainettes, for not even do Missourians appreciate their scenic value. The world is full of beauty spots and our own country has been endowed by a lavish hand, Missouri having no cause to complain of her portion-especially of that part known as the Gasconade country.

The beauty of the Big Tree country is undeniable but we cannot satisfactorily visualize the colossal trees because of our physical limitations. The whole tree cannot be pictured on the human retina except from a distance which destroys the majestic proportions, so we have recourse to mathematics-the big tree is of such and such dimensions, and these figures mean nothing to the average mind. The big tree country like the big mountain country reminds me of good, sweet water and oh, how good it is!

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The fertile plains farming region with its, at times, pleasing monotony so restful to the eye, I would compare to the milk it produces. Milk is so life sustaining as to be invaluable but we do not get excited about it. The gigantic cataracts, the stupendous Royal Gorge and the Grand Canon overwhelm us and burn out our vitality. They pour barrels full into our quart cups. These natural wonders I would compare to heady draughts of brandy and champagne, tremendously stimulating but not to be often-repeated.

The sweet and riante Gasconade country is one we can all understand. The little mountains form just the right sized pictures to fill the eye and set to vibration our proper color sense. We are rested and mildly stimulated always, but not harmfully so. This country I would compare to the rich, red Burgundy, the arterial blood of the grape needed to supplement our own gross sanguinous fluid.

I have made twenty annual pilgrimages to the Gasconade country, never tiring of its kaleidoscopic beauty. This year I was moved to sadness by the thought that in my own particular five miles of the river, centering at Jerome, I was practically the only spectator, for the natives do not seem to be impressed by the vision that brings a tear to

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my eye sight so beautiful that it constricts the heart.

Upon this October occasion the Master Painter had dipped his brushes in scarlet, gold, umber and orange, retouching the foliage of some ten million trees, and all of this apparently for one spectator! But all of this glory cannot be wasted, it must serve some useful purpose unknown to us, just as the surplus light and heat of the sun must do, for the earth and its sister planets receive less than a hundred millionth part of the solar emanation, all the rest of it escapes into space. Some day, perhaps, we will know why.

As I gazed in awe on the masterpiece, the thought occurred to me that perhaps the vision had a host of spectators whom I, with my limitations, could not see. I imagined the left bank of the Gasconade river peopled by the spirits of those who had missed the great things of life. Then I saw in my mind's eye just whom a Father would choose of these and I saw there those who had been physically blind; the host of the merely color blind, which is a grievous affliction, and those who were nearsighted, to whom all objects beyond a few feet seem but a confused blur. All these looked across the moving green waters of the Gasconade at the tier upon tier of colored trees, three

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hundred feet high, constituting a part of the glory of God.

And I beheld still another host of spectators, among them those who had never really seen beauty because of toil so incessant, weariness so profound that Beauty cannot register in the brain. I saw mothers who had lost their babes and had borne the poignant grief

through a lifetime. I saw women whose yearnings for the touch of baby hands had never been satisfied in this life. All these I saw with an humble heart after having dared to think that I alone perceived the effulgence of nature in mid-October in the country of the winding Gasconade.

At the Sign of the Big Tea Kettle

You, of course, remember the hardware and tinnery's shop of Lieber & Bechtel. These partners carried on business until about 1883. Then, to the regret of their many friends, they moved away. Mr. Lieber went to an Arkansas farm, Mr. Bechtel to Tipton in his regular line of work. It is said that Mrs. Lieber was so terribly homesick in her new location that it undermined her health. They had two fine boys who, with their father, returned to Boonville after an absence of ten years and reestablished the business.

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Mr. Bechtel had at that time one small daughter, Francesca, a black haired little witch with big gray eyes-such haunting eyes they were, even then. I remember once seeing them peeping out of an oven, in which the child had curled herself, in her father's store. It was years before I saw her again, then she had grown into a bewitching young lady with the same "come hither" look in her eyes, only more so. She reminded me of Sarah, Carrie and Deedie, all rolled into one. Ah, had I been wiser, or perhaps bolder-who knows?

But the years have flown by. Francesca now has two grown boys, one of whom distinguished himself in our navy during the World War. The younger, I am told, enters Washington University this year. Francesca's hair is whitening as she grows young gracefully. She writes poems now which are eagerly read by "her public" and for which publishers pay real money. I still see her upon occasions, although not so often as I could wish. Heigho, Fate can be so cruel, so cruel!

Have I by any chance indicated that Francesca abides with me and that her sons are also my sons? I did not mean to tell you until now-for Fate can be and has been so kind, so kind!

Now that I have presented her to you, my

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friends, let me say that this is the only sketch she has not criticized - for Francesca reads it now, as do you, for the first time. There was a little wistfulness in her tones when I spoke of my early loves, as if some one was being slighted.

But I could not and cannot write very freely about my favorite poet for obvious reasons, so I must leave you to imagine my sentiments toward one whom "age can not wither, nor custom stale, her infinite variety." That you may judge, somewhat, read what she wrote during the war when our sailor lad was in China.

The Yang-Tse Patrol

'Tis midnight here-'tis blazing noontide yonder.
Where you are dancing on the waves of Life,
And I am kneeling by your vacant bed to ponder,
If I may pray that you be kept from strife.
You there, amid the teeming millions mingled,
Your sun-browned limbs heave with the rhythmic swell
Of hawser, winch or oar-the Great Adventure!
You scratch a hurried card that "All is well!"
'Tis midnight here-the age-old moon is waning-
My life seems placid as distant stars, in truth,

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But in the blazing Oriental noontide,
You slave and joke and laugh, for you are Youth!

And this when in Siberian waters:

A-Wearying

I lie so snug and warm and soft,
And you out on a wintry sea;
My thoughts wing out to you, and oft
I know you're thinking, dear, of me.
I would not keep you though I could
To chafe and spend your days a-fret.
I cannot bend my ways to yours
To suffer what you love. And yet
Time may this great divergence heal,
That keeps our lives so far apart;
For through eternity I feel
Your soul rides anchor in my heart.

This to her mother:

My Mother

Her sweet face I can see in dreams,
Her smile wafts down on memory's beams,
She's here beside me now, it seems,
My lovely lady mother!

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Her eyes had such a glowing light,
They seemed to guide me through the night,
And twinkle like the stars, so bright,
My happy little mother I
Her hands had such a gentle way,
Of rubbing out the cares of day,
Now they are folded, soft away,
My blessed, sainted mother!
Listen to a cry of despair:

I Shall Never See You Again

I shall never see you again!
My crushed heart repeats this refrain.
Summer and winter, springtime and fall,
Sunshine and moonlight, starlight and all-
All will be darker, for you made the hour
Brighter and sweeter, for you had the power
Of making us know there was sun behind rain!
But to think-I shall never see you again!
My heart cries out in its pain-
My crushed heart repeats this refrain,
I shall never-I shall never see you again!

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The Little Feet of Annabelle **"Tes Petits Pieds, si Adores I" -The Beloved Vagabond**

The little feet of Annabelle!
Her little, wavering, untried feet.
Oh what in all the world to me
Seems half so dear,
Seems half so sweet?
Where will they go, these tiny feet?
Oh who can dream,
Oh who can tell!
When succor calls be swift to go,
And ne'er on pity's path be slow,
These fairy feet of Annabelle.
The rosy toes of Annabelle!
Her kisses burdened feet.
Such stony hills these feet may pass,
Which never yet have pressed the grass,
Such zigzag paths through human hearts,

So little known before she starts.
Love's deep insight could not foretell
Roads to be trod by Annabelle!

And, finally, this one written to her unworthy favorite writer of sketches and reminiscences and published in *The Classic* (N. Y.).

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A Sonnet-To You

Sometimes I think you are my Quiet Room.
I come to you from out the deadly glare,
To find a refuge from the world's hot stare,
As one shut in tall aisles of leafy gloom.
I let your calm enfold my restlessness,
Refreshing as the dark, dank canyon's air;
Take off my world-worn chrysalid-let down my hair
Shake free my spirit from old Time's relentlessness.
Soon comes the feeling of pale walls and covered fires.
And as a house is built around and needs each room,
I feel my Quiet Room I could not spare.
For flames burn out, the soaring spirit tires-
My truant heart can sense no deeper doom,
Than some day finding you will not be there!

FRANCESCA.

I think I will now "rest," as the lawyers say.

Finally, Brethren

"And now, gentle reader," as the old timers used to say, I have come to the end of my sketches and reminiscences. I hope that you have enjoyed

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the reading as much as I have the writing of them. I feel that I have renewed old friendships, converted acquaintances into friends, made for myself a place in the hearts of those who are, as the courtly Spaniard says, "simpatico" and have generally become better known to a host of worthwhile people-for one may not write as I have done without much self-revelment, for better or worse.

In writing of my former fellow citizens I have, with two or three exceptions, used actual names. Writing about real people I have told nothing but the truth as "I saw it, but, necessarily, in some cases I have not told the whole truth which, while it might have

added spice to my sketches, would surely have caused heartaches among the innocent. I believe that Home Town Sketches should have the home town kindness and I have endeavored to write accordingly.

I wonder if you have heard the story of that Academician who was appointed by the Forty Immortals to listen to the reading of a play and to render an opinion thereupon! About half through reading his play, the author discovered that his auditor was sound asleep.

"Here, you, sir! how the devil can you deliver an opinion on my play if you go to sleep?"

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"Well, sleep is an opinion," retorted the learned man.

Judging from the many letters I have received, my auditors have remained wide awake and have even reminded me of a lot of good stories that I had left out: some of these I have included herein after "dehorning" or adding thereto a little of the milk of human kindness.

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