

Eugene Field, a Study in Heredity and Contradictions — Volume 1 eBook

Eugene Field, a Study in Heredity and Contradictions — Volume 1

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EUGENE FIELD

CHAPTER I

PEDIGREE

"Sir John Maundeville, Kt.," was his prototype, and Father Prout was his patron saint. The one introduced him to the study of British balladry, the other led him to the classic groves of Horace.

"I am a Yankee by pedigree and education," wrote Eugene Field to Alice Morse Earle, the author of "The Sabbath in Puritan New England," and other books of the same flavor, "but I was born in that ineffably uninteresting city, St. Louis."

How so devoted a child of all that is queer and contradictory in New England character came to be born in "Poor old Mizzoora," as he so often wrote it, is in itself a rare romance, which I propose to tell as the key to the life and works of Eugene Field. Part of it is told in the reports of the Supreme Court of Vermont, part in the most remarkable special pleas ever permitted in a chancery suit in America, and the best part still lingers in the memory of the good people of Newfane and Brattleboro, Vt., where "them Field boys" are still referred to as unaccountable creatures, full of odd conceits, "an' dredful sot when once they took a notion."

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“Them Field boys” were not Eugene and his brother Roswell Martin Field, the joint authors of translations from Horace, known as “Echoes from the Sabine Farm,” but their father, Roswell Martin, and their uncle, Charles Kellogg, Field of Newfane aforesaid.

These two Fields were the sons of General Martin Field, who was born in Leverett, Mass., February 12th, 1773, and of his wife, Esther Smith Kellogg, who was the grandmother celebrated in more than one of Eugene Field’s stories and poems. Through both sides of the houses of Field and Kellogg the pedigree of Eugene can be traced back to the first settlers of New England. But there is no need to go back of the second generation to find and identify the seed whence sprang the strangely interesting subject of this study.

At the opening of the nineteenth century, as now, Newfane, then Fayetteville, was a typical county seat. This pretty New England village, which celebrated the centennial of its organization as a town in 1874, is situated on the West River, some twelve miles from Brattleboro, at which point that noisy stream joins the more sedate Connecticut River. It nestles under the hills upon which, at a distance of two miles, was the site of the original town of Newfane—not a vestige of which remains to remind the traveller that up to 1825 the shire town of Windham County overlooked as grand a panorama as ever opened up before the eye of man. The reason for abandoning the exposed location on the hills for the sheltered nook by the river may be inferred from the descriptive adjectives. The present town of Newfane clusters about a village square, that would have delighted the heart of Oliver Goldsmith. The county highway bisects it. The Windham County Hotel, with the windows of its northern end grated to prevent the escape of inmates—signifying that its keeper is half boniface and half county jailer—bounds it on the east, the Court House and Town Hall, separate buildings, flank it on the west. The Newfane Hotel rambles along half of its northern side, and the Field mansion, with its front garden stretching to the road, does the same for the southern half. In the rear, and facing the opening between the Court House and the Town Hall, stands the Congregational Church, where Eugene Field crunched caraway-seed biscuits when on a visit to his grandmother, and back of this stands another church, spotless in the white paint of Puritan New England meeting-houses, but deserted by its congregation of Baptists, which had dwindled to the vanishing point. In the centre of the village green is a grove of noble elms under whose grateful shade, on the day of my visit to Newfane, I saw a quartette of gray-headed attorneys, playing quoits with horse-shoes. They had come up from Brattleboro to try a case, which had suffered the usual “law’s delay” of a continuance, and were whiling away the hours in the bucolic sport of their ancestors, while the idle villagers enjoyed their unpractised awkwardness. They all boasted how they could ring the peg when they were boys.

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Hither General Martin Field brought the young, and, as surviving portraits testify, beautiful Mistress Kellogg to be his wife. Here to them were born “them Field boys,” Charles K. (April 24th, 1803) and Roswell M. (February 22d, 1807), destined to be thorns in their father’s flesh throughout their school-days, his opponents in every justice’s court where they could volunteer to match their wits against his, and, in the person of Roswell Martin, to be the distraction and despair of the courts of Windsor County and Vermont, until a decision of the Supreme Court so outraged that son’s sense of the sacredness of the marriage vow, that he shook the granite dust of Vermont from his feet, and turned his face to the west, where he became the original counsel in the Dred Scott case, married and had sons of his own.

[Illustration: GENERAL MARTIN FIELD. *Eugene Field’s Grandfather.*]

But before taking up the thread of Roswell Martin Field’s strange and unique story, let me give a letter written by his father to his sister, Miss Mary Field, then at the school of Miss Emma Willard in Troy, N.Y., as exhibit number one, that Eugene Field came by his peculiarities, literary and otherwise, by direct lineal descent. Roswell was a phenomenal scholar, as his own eldest son was not. At the age of eleven he was ready for college, and entered Middlebury with his brother Charles, his senior by four years. How they conducted themselves there may be judged from this letter to their sister:

Newfane, March 31st, 1822.

Dear Mary:

I sit down to write you my last letter while you remain at Troy. Yours by Mr. Read was received, in which I find you allude to the “severe and satirical language” of mine in a former letter. That letter was written upon the conduct of my children, which is an important subject to me. If children are disobedient, a parent has a right to be severe with them. If I recollect right I expressed to you that your two oldest brothers’ conduct was very reprehensible, and I there predicted their ruin. But I then little thought that I should soon witness the sad consequences of their ill-conduct. I received a letter from President Bates about two weeks since and another from Charles the same day, that Charles had been turned away and forever dismissed from the college for his misconduct; Roswell must suffer a public admonition and perhaps more punishment for his evil deeds. Charles was turned out of college the 7th of March, and I wrote on the week after to have him come directly home, but we have heard nothing from him since. Where he is we can form no conjecture. But probably he is five hundred miles distant without money and without friends. I leave you to conjecture the rest. Roswell is left alone at the age of fifteen to get along, if he is permitted to stay through college. These, Mary, are the consequences of dissipation and bad conduct. And seeing as I do the temper

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and disposition of my children, that they “are inclined to evil and that continually,” can you wonder that I write with severity to them? Our hopes are blasted as relates to Charles and Roswell, and you cannot conceive the trouble which they have given us. Your mother is almost crazy about them; nor are we without fears as to you. I say now, as I said in my former letter, that I wish my children were all at home at work. I am convinced that an education will only prove injurious to them. If I had as many sons as had the patriarch Jacob not one should ever again go nigh a college. It is not a good calculation to educate children for destruction. The boys’ conduct has already brought a disgrace upon our family which we can never outgrow. They undoubtedly possess respectable talents and genius, but what are talents worth when wholly employed in mischief? I have expended almost two thousand dollars in educating the boys, and now just at the close they are sent off in disgrace and infamy. The money is nothing in comparison to the disgrace and ruin that must succeed. Mary, think of these things often, and especially when you feel inclined to be gay and airy. Let your brother’s fate be a striking lesson to you. For you may well suppose that you possess something of the same disposition that he does, but I hope that you will exercise more prudence than he has. You must now return home with a fixed resolution to become a steady, sober, and industrious girl. Give up literary pursuits and quietly and patiently follow that calling which I am convinced is most proper for my children. It does appear to me that if children would consider how much anxiety their parents have for them they would conduct themselves properly, if it was only to gratify their parents. But it is not so. Many of them seem determined not only to wound the feelings of the parents in the most cruel manner but also to ruin themselves.

Remember us respectfully to Dr. and Mrs. Willard, and I am your affectionate father

MARTIN FIELD.

That Mary did return home to be the mediator between her incensed and stern father and his wayward and mischievous, but not incorrigible sons, is part of the sequel to this letter. What her daughter, Mary Field French, afterwards became to the sons of the younger of the reprehensible pair of youthful collegians will appear later on in this narrative. It is beautifully acknowledged in the dedication of Eugene Field’s “Little Book of Western Verse,” which I had the honor of publishing for the subscribers in 1889, more than three score years after the date of the foregoing letter. In that dedication, with the characteristic license of a true artist, Field credited the choice of Miss French for the care of his youthful years to his mother:

*A dying mother gave to you
Her child a many years ago;
How in your gracious love he grew,
You know dear, patient heart, you know.*

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* * * * *

*To you I dedicate this book,
And, as you read it line by line.
Upon its faults as kindly look
As you have always looked on mine.*

In truth, however, it was the living bereaved father who turned in the bewilderment of his grief to the “dear patient heart” of his sister, to find a second mother for his two motherless boys. To Martin Field, Mary was a guardian daughter, to Charles K. and Roswell M. 1st, she was a loyal and mediating sister, and to Eugene and Roswell M. 2d, she was a loving aunt, as her daughter Mary was an indulgent mother and unfailing friend. The last name survived “the love and gratitude” of Eugene’s dedication ten years.

As may have been surmised the parental forebodings of the grieved and satirical General Field were not realized in the eternal perdition of his two sons. Education did not prove their destruction. With more than respectable talents Charles was reinstated at Middlebury, and four months later graduated with high honors, while Roswell took his degree when only fifteen years old, the plague and admiration of his preceptors, and, we may well suppose, the pride and joy of the agonized parents, who welcomed the graduates to Newfane with all the profusion of a prodigal father and the love of a distracted but doting mother. They never had any reason to doubt the nature of sister Mary’s reception.

Charles and Roswell studied law with their father in the quaint little office detached from the Field homestead at Newfane. The word edifice might fittingly be applied to this building which, though only one room square and one story high, has a front on the public square, with miniature Greek columns to distinguish it from the ordinary outbuildings that are such characteristic appendages of New England houses. The troubles of General Field with his two sons were not to end when he got them away from the temptations of college life, for they were prone to mischief, “and that continually,” even under his severe and watchful eye. This took one particular form which is the talk of Windham County even yet. By reason of their presence in General Field’s office they were early apprised of actions at law which he was retained to institute; whereupon they sought out the defendant and offered their services to represent him gratis. Thus the elder counsellor frequently found himself pitted in the justice’s courts against his keen-witted and graceless sons, who availed themselves of every obsolete technicality, quirk, and precedent of the law to obstruct justice and worry their dignified parent, whom they addressed as “our learned but erring brother in the law.” Not infrequently these youthful practitioners triumphed in these legal tilts, to the mortification of their father, who, in his indignation, could not conceal his admiration for the ingenuity of their misdirected professional zeal.

[Illustration: ESTHER S. FIELD. *Eugene Field's Grandmother.*]

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Two years after his graduation, and when only seventeen years of age, Eugene Field's father was sufficiently learned in the law to be admitted to the bar of Vermont. They wasted no time in those good old days. Before he was thirty, Roswell M. Field had represented his native town in the General Assembly, had been elected several times State's Attorney, and in every way seemed destined to play a notable part in the affairs of Vermont, if not on a broader field. He was not only a lawyer of full and exact learning, an ingenious pleader, and a powerful advocate, but an exceptionally accomplished scholar. His knowledge of Greek, Latin, French, and German rendered their literature a perennial source upon which to draw for the illumination and embellishment of the pure and virile English of which he was master. It was from him that Eugene inherited his delight in queer and rare objects of vertu and that "rich, strong, musical and sympathetic voice" which would have been invaluable on the stage, and of which he made such captivating use among his friends. Would that he had also inherited that "strong and athletic" frame which, according to his aged preceptor, enabled Roswell M. Field to graduate at the age of fifteen. It is not, however, for his learning and accomplishments of mind and person that we are interested in Roswell Martin Field, but for the strange incident in his life that uprooted him from the congenial environments of New England and the career opening so temptingly before him, to transplant him to Missouri, there to become the father of a youth, who, by all laws of heredity and by the peculiar tang of his genius, should have been born and nurtured amid the stern scenes and fixed customs of Puritan New England. That story must be told in another chapter.

CHAPTER II

HIS FATHER'S FIRST LOVE-AFFAIR

Many a time and oft in our walks and talks has Eugene Field told me the story I am about to relate, but never with the particularity of detail and the authority of absolute data with which I have "comprehended it," as he would say, in the following pages. It was his wish that it should be told, and I follow his injunction the more readily, as in its relation I am able to demonstrate how clearly the son inherited his peculiar literary mode from the father.

It may be said further that, had the remarkable situation which grew out of Roswell M. Field's first marriage occurred one hundred years earlier, or had it occurred in our own day in a state like Kentucky, it would have provoked a feud that could only have been settled by blood, while it might readily have imbrued whole counties. Even in Vermont it stirred up animosities which occupied the attention of the courts for years, and which the lapse of nearly two generations has not wholly eradicated from the memory of old inhabitants. In the opening remarks of the opinion of the Supreme Court, in one of several cases growing out of it,

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I find the following statement: "It would be inexpedient to recapitulate the testimony in a transaction which was calculated to call up exasperated feelings, which has apparently taxed ingenuity and genius to criminate and recriminate, where a deep sense of injury is evidently felt and expressed by the parties to the controversy, and where this state of feeling has extended, as it was to be expected, to all the immediate friends of the parties, who from their situation were necessarily compelled to become witnesses and to testify in the case."

In the relation of this story I shall substitute Christian names for the surnames of the parties outside of the Field family, although all have become public property and the principals are dead. The scene is laid in the adjoining counties of Windham and Windsor in the Green Mountain State, and this is how it happened:

There lived at Windsor, in the county of the same name, a widow named Susanna, and she was well-to-do according to the modest standard of the times. She was blest with a goodly family of sons and daughters, among whom was Mary Almira, a maiden fair to look upon and impressionable withal. Now it befell that Mary Almira, while still very young, was sent to school at the Academy in Leicester, Mass., where she met, and, in the language of the law, formed "a natural and virtuous attachment" with a student named Jeremiah, sent thither by his guardian from Oxbridge in the state last before mentioned. They met, vowed eternal devotion and parted, as many school-children have done before and will do again.

After her return to Windsor, Jeremiah seemingly faded from the thoughts of Mary Almira, so that when she subsequently accompanied her mother on a visit to Montreal, she felt free to experience "a sincere and lively affection" for a Canadian youth named Elder. So lively was this affection that when Jeremiah next saw Mary Almira it had completely effaced him from her memory. Nothing daunted, however, being then of the mature age of eighteen years and eight months, and two years Mary's senior, he resumed the siege of her heart, and in short order their engagement was duly "promulgated and even notorious."

Before Mary succumbed to the second suit of Jeremiah, she waited for a pledge of affection from young Mister Elder in the shape of an album in which he was to have forwarded a communication, and it was "in the bitterness of her disappointment at not receiving a letter, message, or remembrance from Mister Elder that she formed the engagement with Jeremiah, in order that she might gratify her resentment by sending the news of the same to Mister Elder." This she did with a peremptory request for the return of her album without the leaves on which he had written. What was her chagrin and unavailing remorse on receiving the album to find that every leaf was cut out but one, a mute witness to her "infidelity to her early lover." Small wonder that "her tenderness revived," and "she cursed the hour in which she had formed the precipitate

engagement with Jeremiah, and oftentimes she shed over that album tears of heartfelt sorrow and regret.” At least so we are told in the pleadings, from which authentic source I draw my quotations.

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Now Mary was nothing if not precipitate, for all this came to pass in the spring or summer of 1831, when she was not quite sweet seventeen. It also happened without the knowledge or concern of Roswell Martin Field, who was a young and handsome bachelor of quick wit and engaging manners, living at Fayetteville in the neighboring county, "knowing nothing at that time of the said Mary Almira, her lovers, suitors, promises, engagements, intimacies, visits or movements whatsoever." He was soon to know.

In the summer of 1832 it happened that Mary Almira was on a visit to Mrs. Jonathan, her cousin german, the wife of Justice Jonathan of Brattleboro, Vt. And now fate began to take a swift and inexplicable interest in the affairs of Mary and Roswell. On August 30th, 1832, in company with Mrs. Jonathan and Mrs. French (the Mary Field of the first chapter of this book), Miss Mary Almira visited Fayetteville, and, we are told, "when the chaise containing the said ladies arrived Roswell advanced to hand them out, and then for the first time saw and was introduced to said Mary Almira, who received him with a nod and a broad good-humored laugh." She remained over night, the guest of Mrs. French, and Roswell saw her only for a few moments in his sister's sitting-room. What occurred is naively told under oath in the following extract from the pleadings:

"Some conversation of a general nature passed between them, and as the said Mary Almira was a young lady of very pleasing face and form and agreeable manners, it is by no means improbable that he (Roswell) manifested to said Mary Almira that in those matters he was not wholly devoid of sensibility and discernment." The next morning Mary returned to Brattleboro with Mrs. Jonathan, and Roswell "did not then expect ever to see her more."

But it was otherwise decreed, for after the lapse of eleven days Justice Jonathan had professional business in Fayetteville, and, lo! Mary Almira attended him. It was Tuesday, September 11th, when for a second time she dawned on the discerning view of Roswell. For eight days she lingered as a guest of Mrs. French, whose brother began to show signs of awakening sensibility, although at this time informed of the unbroken pact between Mary Almira and Jeremiah. How young love took its natural course is told in the pleadings by Roswell with protests "against the manifest breach of delicacy and decorum of calling him into this Honorable Court to render an account of his attentions to a lady," and "more especially when that lady is his lawful wedded wife."

When Mary had been in Fayetteville four days it happened that Justice Jonathan was called to Westminster. When asked if she was inclined to accompany him, Mary turned to Roswell and "inquired with a smile if it was not likely to rain?" and Roswell confesses "that he told her that it would be very imprudent for her to set out."

[Illustration: ROSWELL MARTIN FIELD. *Eugene Field's Father.*]

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Still protesting against the manifest indelicacy of the revelation, Roswell has told for us the story of his first advances upon the citadel of Mary's affections in words as cunningly chosen as were ever the best passages in the writings of his son Eugene. It was on the evening of September 13th that these advances first passed the outworks of formal civility. "When bidding the said Mary Almira good-night in the sitting-room of Mrs. French, as he was about to retire into his lodgings, Roswell plucked a leaf from the rosebush in the room, kissed it, and presented it to her; on the next day when he saw the said Mary Almira she took from her bosom a paper, unfolded it, and showed Roswell a leaf (the same, he supposes, that was presented the evening before), neatly stitched on the paper, and which she again carefully folded and replaced in her bosom."

Another evening they played at chess, and with her permission Roswell named the queen Miss Almira, and he bent all his energies to the capture of that particular piece. He sacrificed every point of the game to that object, and when it was triumphantly achieved, "took note of the pleasure and delight manifested by said Mary Almira at the ardor with which he pursued his object and kissed his prize." On still another occasion "Jeremiah was introduced into the game as a black bishop, but very soon was exchanged for a pawn."

On the day when Roswell advised Mary that it would be imprudent for her to accompany Justice Jonathan to Westminster, she was "graciously pleased to make, with her own fair hand, a pocket pin-cushion of blue silk and to put the same into Roswell's hands, at the same time remarking that blue was the emblem of love and constancy," and Roswell "confesses that he received the same with a profound bow."

They were now in the rapids, with Jeremiah forgotten on the bank.

Roswell complimented "the beauty of said Almira's hair, whereupon she graciously consented to present him with a lock of the same, and he humbly confesses that he accepted, kissed, and pressed it to his heart."

Next morning, as they stood side by side, with Roswell holding her hand "and carelessly turning over the leaves of a Bible," his eye accidentally rested on this passage of the book of Jeremiah: "As for me, behold, I am in your hand: do with me as seemeth good and meet unto you." And "thereupon he pointed out such text to said Mary Almira, and she responded to the same with a blush and a smile." Roswell further confessed, "that with the kind permission of said Mary Almira he did at various times press the hand of said Mary Almira, and with her like gracious permission did kiss her hand, her cheek, and her lips." Who, with such kind and gracious permission, would have confined himself to remarks about the weather?

Such were the only "artifices and persuasions, ways and means" by which Roswell came between Mary Almira and the promise she had made to the absent Jeremiah—the same ways and means that have been employed from the days of Adam, and which will

be successful while woman is fair and man is bold. It was Roswell's belief that "his attentions and addresses were from the first agreeable to Mary's feelings and welcome to her heart," and he swore "that they were always permitted and received with great kindness and sweetness of manner."

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When Mary left Fayetteville, on Wednesday, September 19th, it was “appointed” that he should call on her at Brattleboro on the following Wednesday, and like a true knight he kept his tryst. That his reception was not frigid may be inferred from the record of the calls that followed in rapid succession, to-wit: Thursday afternoon; Monday, October 2d, evening; Tuesday afternoon and evening; Wednesday afternoon and evening; Wednesday (October 9th) afternoon and evening; Friday evening; Saturday evening, and Sunday forenoon and evening.

No wonder the report of the bombardment reached the ears of widow Susanna at Windsor, fifty miles away, and Justice and Mrs. Jonathan “expostulated with Mary Almira upon the impropriety, as they called it, of her receiving the attentions of Roswell without informing her mother.”

Space forbids the recital of the uninterrupted, undisturbed, and agreeable conversations between the young twain that are to be found in the pleadings in this case. They were brought to a sharp conclusion by the receipt of a letter from Susanna ordering her daughter to return to Windsor forthwith. Justice Jonathan remarked that Mrs. Susanna was “undoubtedly right, for this young lady ought not to be receiving the gallantries from one young gentleman when she was under engagement to another.”

The mother’s letter was received Saturday evening, October 12th, and produced consternation in the breasts of the young lovers, Mary clinging around Roswell’s neck “with all the ardor of youthful, passionate love.” They resolved to wed without the knowledge, consent, or blessing of Mrs. Susanna or Jeremiah, and on the morning of October 15th, 1832, Roswell went to the house of Justice Jonathan by appointment “to be joined in marriage unto said Mary Almira according to law.” Justice and Mrs. Jonathan expostulated against such a marriage without Mrs. Susanna being first consulted, and after a long conference Justice Jonathan flatly declined to tie the civil knot. It was finally decided that the marriage should take place at Putney, a small town of Windham County, some twelve miles on the Post-road to Windsor. Justice Jonathan proceeded with the young lady in his carriage, and in due course arrived at Putney. There he was surprised to find the ardent and impatient Roswell, who, although behind at the start, had passed him on the way, and had already made the necessary preparations with Justice of the Peace Asa to perform the statutory ceremony. This followed “in a solemn, serious, and impressive manner in the front room of the public house, the said Jonathan alone being present besides the parties and the magistrate.”

The relations of Roswell and Mary Almira as man and wife began and ended before Justice Asa in that public house in Putney. In the language of the pleadings: “Immediately, within a few minutes after said marriage ceremony, said Mary Almira went with Justice Jonathan toward Windsor, and Roswell in a short time returned to his residence at Fayetteville.”

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There were deeper consequences involved in that simple parting than could have been imagined by any of the parties or than are concealed in the musty and voluminous court records of Windsor County and the state of Vermont.

Eugene Field had an entirely different conception of the nature of this marriage from that revealed by the record. According to his version, there was an old blue law in Vermont which rendered it necessary, in order to exonerate the groom in a runaway match from any other motive than love and affection, that the bride should be divested of all her earthly goods. So when Mary Almira arrived at Putney he thought that she retired to a closet, removed her clothing, and, thrusting her arm through a hole in the door, was joined in holy wedlock to Roswell, who, with the Justice and the witnesses, remained in the outer room.

Eugene Field undoubtedly derived this version of his father's marriage from the tradition of one that actually took place in the Field mansion on Newfane Hill in 1789. That was the marriage of Major Moses Joy of Putney to Mrs. Hannah Wood of Newfane, and the unique nature of the proceedings followed legal advice in order to avoid any responsibility for the debts of Mrs. Ward's former husband, who had died insolvent. The story which I find in the Centennial history of Newfane is as follows:

"Mrs. Ward placed herself in a closet with a tire-woman, who stripped her of all clothing, and while in a perfectly nude state she thrust her fair round arm through a diamond hole in the door of the closet, and the gallant Major clasped the hand of the nude and buxom widow, and was married in due form by the jolliest parson in Vermont. At the close of the ceremony the tire-woman dressed the bride in a complete wardrobe which the Major had provided and caused to be deposited in the closet at the commencement of the ceremony. She came out elegantly dressed in silk, satin, and lace, and there was kissing all around."

To resume our story. On leaving Putney, accompanied by Justice Jonathan, Mary Almira returned to her mother's residence at Windsor. Nothing was communicated to Mrs. Susanna or to the relatives of the young bride in regard to the ceremony at Putney. But they, being aware of the engagement to Jeremiah, and having heard rumors of the attentions of Roswell, thought propriety demanded an early fulfilment of the prior engagement. On the day of her arrival home, and on October 21st and 31st, Mary wrote to Roswell letters, from which we have the assurance of the Supreme Court of Vermont: "It would appear that she entertained a strong affection for him and probably viewed him as the husband with whom she should thereafter live, although the last letter does not breathe the same affection as the former ones."

But the plot was thickening. On the day after her return home Mary also wrote to Jeremiah in Boston, and a fortnight had not elapsed before she wrote again, "a very pressing letter, urging him to come immediately to Windsor." Roswell learned from Mary's letters that her friends were opposed to her forming any connection, except with

Jeremiah, and he made the mistake of replying by letter instead of appearing in person, urging his claims and carrying off his bride.

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Some time before the 1st of November the family of Mary had heard of the ceremony at Putney, for on Jeremiah's arrival, in lover-like compliance with her urgent message, he was informed of the situation. After a hurried council of war, and under legal advice, the following letter was drafted and forwarded to Roswell by the hands of Judge Bikens, the family lawyer:

To Mr. Roswell Field:

Sir: Moments of deep consideration and much reflection have at length caused me to see in its proper light the whole of my late visit to Brattleboro. That I have been led by you and others to a course of conduct which my own feelings, reason, and sense entirely disapprove, is now very clear to me. I therefore write this to inform you that I am not willing on any account to see you again. Neither will I by any course you can adopt be prevailed upon to view the matter in a different light from what I now do. I leave you the alternative of forever preventing the public avowal of a disgraceful transaction, of which you yourself said you were ashamed.

Mary A.

This veiled repudiation of the marriage at Putney was placed in Roswell's hands by Judge Bikens and was instantly "pronounced an impudent forgery." Being in the dark as to how far Mary's family had been informed of their marriage, Roswell avoided any expression that might reveal it to Judge Bikens, and refused to accept the letter as a true expression of his wife's feelings and wishes. He at once wrote to her, urging that their marriage should be made public and that thus an end should be put to the suit of Jeremiah. To this Mary made reply that the above letter "contained her real sentiments." Before this note reached Fayetteville Roswell had started for Windsor. On the way he halted his horse at Putney, where he learned that Mary's family was fully informed of the marriage as performed by Justice Asa.

A very embarrassing interview followed between Roswell and the family of his recalcitrant bride. On entering the room he advanced to Mary, and, extending his hand, "asked her how she did." But she looked at her mother and rejected his hand. A similar advance to Mrs. Susanna met with a like rebuff. Being considerably left alone in the room with Mary Almira by her mother and brother, who, with a sister, stood at the door listening, Roswell had what he was not disposed to regard as a private audience with his legal wife. In answer to his natural inquiry as to what it all meant, Mary said that since she had come home and thought it all over she found that she *did* love Jeremiah; that Jeremiah had been very kind to her, and she thought she ought to marry Jeremiah.

Roswell inquired how she could do that, as she was already married.

"Why," said the fickle Mary, "you can give up the certificate; let it all go and nobody will know anything about it." After some natural remonstrances, Mary continued: "Come,

now, you've got the certificate in your pocket, and you can give it up just as well as not and let me marry Jeremiah," at the same time holding out her hand as if for the document.

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The startling effrontery of the proposal provoked Roswell, and he told her that so far as a separation from himself was concerned she should be gratified to her heart's content, and that while she remained as she was he would not divulge the marriage, but he warned her that if she should attempt marriage with another he would publish the marriage at Putney in every parish church and newspaper in New England.

At this point the private interview was interrupted by the hasty entrance of Mistress Susanna, who advanced in great agitation, as the pleadings inform us, and said to Roswell:

"Mister Field, why can't you give up that stiffiket" (meaning, as he supposed, certificate) "and let things be as if they had never been?"

Thereupon "Mister Field" proceeded to point out to the entire family of Mary Almira, which had assembled from the doors and keyholes where they had been eavesdropping, "the wickedness and folly of Mistress Susanna's request." One of Mary's brothers admitted that Roswell's refusal "to connive to the dishonor of his wife" was correct and honorable, and that he should not be asked to make any such arrangement.

Roswell was greatly shocked and disgusted at the appearance, language, and manner of Mary Almira, and he was borne out in his impression of her character by the admission of one brother that she was "a giddy, inconsistent, unprincipled girl," and by that of another that "she was a volatile coquette, who did not know her own mind from day to day."

Roswell remained in Windsor three days, but did not again see Mary Almira; whereupon, feeling that nothing was to be gained by exposing "himself to renewed insults, he returned home for a few days."

It appears that all this time Jeremiah was lurking in the vicinity, holding secret interviews with Mary and her family, and "devising ways and means" for the bigamous marriage which, according to the belief of Roswell, was performed between Jeremiah and Mary Almira somewhere in New Hampshire between the 14th and 27th of November. Roswell M. Field never recognized the legality of any such ceremony or that Mary and Jeremiah had the lawful right to intermarry while the marriage at Putney remained in full force and effect. He had reason to be thankful for his escape from a union for life with a woman of such frivolous nature and easy indifference to the most sacred obligations of human and divine law. But he would not permit himself to become a silent copartner in what, to his strict notion of the inviolability of the marriage contract, was one of the most heinous crimes against society and morals. He, therefore, took every means in his power to bring obloquy and punishment upon the guilty parties. He instituted various proceedings at law to test the validity of the marriage at Putney. He, among other measures, filed a petition in the Probate Court to secure an accounting from Mistress

Susanna as guardian of the estate of his wife Mary Almira. But Susanna avoided the issue by a technical plea.

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He brought an action of ejectment in the name of himself and Mary Almira to recover possession of a tenement in Windsor of which she was the owner, and secured judgment without any defence being offered.

He secured the indictment of one of her brothers in the United States District Court for having opened one of his letters to his wife.

He presented a statement of the facts of the abduction and bigamous marriage of Mary Almira to the Grand Jury of Windsor County, and procured an indictment against her two brothers and Mary Almira and Jeremiah "for conspiracy to carry her without the state of Vermont" to become the bigamous wife of Jeremiah.

He followed Jeremiah and Mary to Boston in July, 1833, and laid the matter before the Grand Jury there, but before any action could be taken Jeremiah and Mary Almira "withdrew from the city of Boston, left New England, took passage at the city of New York in an outward bound vessel, and retired to the other side of the Atlantic."

Out of one of the actions instituted in the name of Roswell Field and Mary Almira, his wife, grew a libel suit, brought by Mistress Susanna against him, in which the special pleas drawn and filed by Roswell Field were pronounced by Justice Story "to be masterpieces of special pleading." Through all these proceedings Mr. Field disclaimed all intention or wish "to visit legal pains and penalties" upon his wife, whom he regarded "as the victim and scapegoat of a wicked conspiracy."

Finally, and after the birth of a child, Jeremiah and Mary Almira were forced to bring a suit for the nullification of the Putney marriage. Field met the complaint with a plea that set out all the facts. He contended that, as the Putney marriage was between persons of legal discretion and consent, there could be no condition that would render it voidable at the election of either. Every law and precedent was in favor of the inviolability of the Putney marriage, and yet so powerful were the family influences and so distressing would have been the results of a finding in his favor, that the lower court preferred to disregard precedents and law rather than illegitimatize the innocent children of Jeremiah and Mary. The same view was taken by the higher court, which absolved Mary of "being fully acquainted with the legal consequences of a solemnization of marriage." The court itself was forced to regard the ceremony as "a promise or engagement to marry," rather than a completed and sacred contract. The opinion as rendered is one long apology for declaring the Putney marriage invalid, in order to save Mary Almira from the crime of bigamy and her children from being the offspring of an illicit union.

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The conclusion of the opinion reflects the spirit in which it was rendered. "It may be proper to add," said the court, "that we are not disposed to animadvert on the conduct of the parties or of their respective friends and connections, nor to pronounce any opinion further than is required to show the grounds of our determination. The immediate parties may find some excuse or palliation in the thoughtlessness of youth, the strength of affection, the pangs of disappointment and blighted hopes, in versatility of feeling to which all are subject, and in constitutional temperament. The conduct of the friends of either is not to be judged of nor censured in consequence of the unfortunate results which have attended this truly unfortunate case. In judging of the past transactions of others, which have terminated either favorably or unfavorably, we are apt to say that a different course was required and would have produced a different effect. But who can say what would have been the inevitable consequences of a different line of conduct by the friends of either party? The infatuation and the determination of the parties to pursue that course which was most agreeable to their own feelings and views, placed their friends and acquaintances in a very unpleasant situation, and it would be wrong for us now to say that they were not actuated by good motives, and did not pursue that line of conduct which they thought at the time duty dictated. We inquire not as to the conduct of others, we censure them not, nor do we say anything as to the parties before us, except what has been thought necessary in deciding the case."

The decree of nullification was affirmed in July, 1839, and before the close of the year Roswell M. Field had shaken the dust of Vermont from his feet and taken up his residence in St. Louis. Thus Vermont lost the most brilliant young advocate of his day, and Missouri gained the lawyer who was to adorn its bar and institute the proceedings for the manumission of Dred Scott, the slave, whose case defined the issues of our Civil War.

CHAPTER III

THE DRED SCOTT CASE

Vermont's loss was Missouri's gain. The young lawyer, who had been admitted to the bar of his native state at the age of eighteen, was fully equipped to match his learning, wit, and persuasive manners against such men as Benton, Gamble, and Bates, who were the leaders of the Missouri bar when, in 1839, Roswell Field took up his residence in St. Louis. Now it was that his familiarity and facility with French, German, and Spanish stood him in good stead and, combined with his solid legal attainments, speedily won for him the rank of the ablest lawyer in his adopted state.

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But Roswell Field brought from Vermont something more than an exceptional legal equipment and the familiarity with the languages that is necessary to a mastery of the intricate old Spanish and French claims which were plastered over Missouri in those early days. He had inherited through his mother, from her grim old Puritan ancestors, the positive opinions and unquenchable sense of duty that constitute the far-famed New England conscience. He was born with a repugnance to slavery, whether of the will or of the body, and grew to manhood in the days when the question of the extension of negro slavery to the states and territories was the subject of fierce debate throughout the union. He had fixed convictions on the subject when he left Newfane, and he carried them with him to the farther bank of the Mississippi.

It is to the uncompromising New England conscience of Roswell Field that his countrymen owe the institution of the proceedings that finally developed into the Dred Scott case, in which the question of the legal status of a negro was passed upon by the Supreme Court of the United States. This is very properly regarded as the most celebrated of the many important cases adjudicated by our highest tribunal, for not only did it settle the status of Dred Scott temporarily, but the decision handed down by Chief Justice Taney is the great classic of a great bench. It denied the legal existence of the African race as persons in American society and in constitutional law, and also denied the supremacy of Congress over the territories and the constitutionality of the "Missouri Compromise." Four years of civil war were necessary to overrule this sweeping opinion of Chief Justice Taney's, which is still referred to with awe and veneration by a large minority, if not by a majority, of the legal profession.

To Roswell Field belongs the honor of instituting the original action for Dred Scott, without fee or expectation of compensation. The details of this celebrated case, after it got into the United States courts, are a part of the history of our country. What I am about to relate is scarcely known outside of the old Court House and Hall of Records in St. Louis.

Dred Scott was a negro slave of Dr. Emerson, a surgeon in the United States Army, then stationed in Missouri. Dr. Emerson took Scott with him when, in 1834, he moved to Illinois, a free state, and subsequently to Fort Snelling, Wis. This territory, being north of 36 degrees and 30 minutes, was free soil under the Missouri Compromise of 1820. At Fort Snelling, Scott married a colored woman who had also been taken as a slave from Missouri. When Dr. Emerson returned to Missouri he brought Dred Scott, his wife, and child with him. The case came to the attention of Roswell Field, and at once enlisted all his human sympathy and great legal ability. His first petition to the Circuit Court for the County of St. Louis is too important and unique a human document not to be preserved in full. It reads:

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Your petitioner, a man of color, respectfully represents that sometime in the year 1835 your petitioner was purchased as a slave by one John Emerson, since deceased, who afterwards, to wit, about the year 1836 or 1839, conveyed your petitioner from the State of Missouri to Fort Snelling, a fort then occupied by the troops of the United States, and under the jurisdiction of the United States, situated in the territory ceded by France to the United States under the name of Louisiana, lying North of 36 degrees and 30 minutes North latitude, not included within the limits of the State of Missouri; and resided and continued to reside at said Fort Snelling for upwards of one year, and holding your petitioner in slavery at said Fort during all that time; in violation of the act of Congress of March 6th, 1820, entitled "An act to authorize the people of Missouri Territory to form a constitution and State government and for the admission of such state into the Union on an equal footing with the original states and to prohibit slavery in certain territories." Your petitioner avers that said Emerson has since departed this life, leaving a widow, Irene Emerson, and an infant child whose name is unknown to your petitioner, and that one Alexander Sandford has administered upon the estate of said Emerson and that your petitioner is now unlawfully held by said Sandford as said Administrator and said Irene Emerson who claims your petitioner as part of the estate of said Emerson and by one said Samuel Russell.

Your petitioner therefore prays your Honorable Court to grant him leave to sue as a free person in order to establish his right to freedom and that the necessary orders may be made in the premises.

(Signed) DRED SCOTT.

his DRED X SCOTT mark

Sworn to and subscribed before me this 1st day July, 1847,
PETER W. JOHNSTONE, J.P.

Upon reading the above petition this day, it being the opinion of the Judge of the Circuit Court that the said petition contains sufficient matter to authorize the commencement of a suit for his freedom, it is hereby ordered that the said petitioner, Dred Scott, be allowed to sue, on giving security satisfactory to the Clerk of the Circuit Court for all costs that may be adjudged against him, and that he have reasonable liberty to attend his counsel and the Court as occasion may require, and that he be not subjected to any severity on account of this application for his freedom and that he be not removed out of the jurisdiction of the Court.

A. HAMILTON,
Judge of the St. Louis Circuit Court, 8th Judicial Circuit, Mo.
July 2d, 1847.



Having obtained the desired leave to sue from Judge Alexander Hamilton, Roswell Field procured Joseph Charless, one of the leading citizens of St. Louis, to execute the necessary bond for costs. Then he lost no time in filing the following complaint, which I have no doubt Eugene Field would have mortgaged many weeks' salary to number among his most precious possessions. He would have cherished it above the Gladstone axe, for, while that felled mighty oaks, this brief document laid the axe at the root of a deadly upas-tree which threatened the destruction of a free republic. I offer no apology for its insertion here:

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STATE OF MISSOURI,) COUNTY OF ST. LOUIS) ss.

CIRCUIT COURT OF ST. LOUIS, ST. LOUIS COUNTY. November Term, 1847.

Dred Scott, a man of color, by his attorneys, plaintiff in this suit, complains of Alexander Sandford as administrator of the estate of John Emerson deceased, Irene Emerson and Samuel Russell, defendants of a plea of trespass. For that the said defendants heretofore, to wit on the 1st day of July in the year 1846 at to wit the County of St. Louis aforesaid with force and arms assaulted the said plaintiff and then and there, beat, bruised, and ill-treated him and then and there imprisoned and kept and detained him in prison there without any reasonable or probable cause whatsoever, for a long time, to wit for the space of one year, then next following, contrary to law and against the will of the said plaintiff; and the said plaintiff avers that before and at the time of the committing of the grievances aforesaid, he the said plaintiff was then and there and still is a free person, and that the said defendants held and still hold him in slavery, and other wrongs to the said plaintiff then and there did against the peace of the State of Missouri to the damage of the said plaintiff in the sum of (\$300) Three Hundred Dollars, and therefore he sues.

FIELD & HALL, *Attys. for Plff.*

With this brief and bald complaint for trespass to the person and false imprisonment was begun a long and stubbornly fought litigation, extending over ten years, and which was destined to end in Chief Justice Taney declaring:

They [negroes] had for more than a century before [the Declaration of Independence] been regarded as beings of an inferior order, and altogether unfit to associate with the white race, either in social or political relations; and so far inferior that they had no rights which the white man was bound to respect; and that the negro might justly and lawfully be reduced to slavery for his benefit. He was bought and sold and treated as an ordinary article of merchandise and traffic whenever a profit could be made by it.

From the beginning of his connection with this case Roswell Field contended for the broad principle enunciated by Lord Mansfield that "Slavery is so odious that nothing can be suffered to support it but positive law." He consented to a discontinuance of the original action because of the variance of the complaint from the subsequently discovered facts. In the second suit Dred Scott and his family were declared free by the local court, but the judgment was reversed on appeal to the Supreme Court of the state. Judge Gamble, in dissenting from the opinion of the majority of the Court, held that "In Missouri it has been recognized from the beginning of the Government as a correct position in law that a master who takes his slave to reside in a state or territory where slavery is prohibited thereby emancipates his slave."

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The subsequent sale of Dred Scott to a citizen of New York named Sandford afforded Roswell Field the opportunity to renew the fight for Scott's freedom in the United States Circuit Court at St. Louis. The case was tried in May, 1854, and it was again declared that Scott and his family "were negro slaves, the lawful property of Sandford." Roswell Field immediately appealed by writ of error to the Supreme Court of the United States, where the appeal was first argued early in 1856, and a second time in December of the same year. Mr. Field's connection with the case ended when he prepared the papers on appeal and sent his brief to Montgomery Blair, with whom was associated for Scott on the second hearing George Ticknor Curtis. Both of these eminent lawyers emulated the example of Eugene Field's father, who for nearly nine years had devoted a large share of his time and energy to the fight of a penniless negro slave for liberty.

Looking back now it is almost impossible to realize how the issue in this case stirred the nation to its depth. It was first argued while the country was in the throes of the fierce Fremont-Buchanan campaign, and it was believed that the second hearing was ordered by a pro-slavery court after Buchanan's election, to permit more time in which to formulate the extraordinary decision at which the majority of the court arrived. The decision was political rather than judicial, and challenged the attention of the people beyond any act of the Supreme Court before or since.

The Civil War was virtually an appeal from the judgment of Chief Justice Taney and his associates to the God of Battles.

It must not be thought that a single case, although the most celebrated in the annals of American jurisprudence, was Roswell Field's sole claim to the title of leader of the Missouri bar during his lifetime. The records of the Superior Court of that state bear interesting and convincing testimony to the exceptional brilliancy of Eugene Field's father, while the tributes to his memory, by his brothers at the bar and the judges before whom he appeared, prove that in all the relations of life he fulfilled the promise of ability and genius given in his graduation from college at an age when most boys are entering a preparatory school.

Before dismissing Roswell Field to take up the story of his son's career, I wish to quote a few passages from a brief memoir which is preserved in the history of Newfane, as throwing direct hereditary light on the peculiar character, fascinating personality, and entertaining genius of his son.

As I may hereafter have occasion to refer to Eugene Field's political convictions, let us begin these quotations with one as to his father's politics:

"In the dark days of the Rebellion, during the years 1861 and 1862, when the friends of the Union in St. Louis and Missouri felt that they were in imminent danger of being drawn from their homes and of having their estates confiscated by rebels and traitors,

General Lyon, General Blair, and R.M. Field were among the calm, loyal, and patriotic men who influenced public action and saved the city and state.”

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Those of my readers who knew the son will recognize much that captivated them in this description of the father:

“In his social relations he was a genial and entertaining companion, unsurpassed in conversational powers, delighting in witty and sarcastic observations and epigrammatic sentences. He was elegant in his manners and bland and refined in his deportment. He was a skilful musician and passionately fond of children, and it was his wont in early life to gather them in groups about him and beguile them by the hour with the music of the flute or violin. He was actually devoid of all ambition for power and place, and uniformly declined all offers of advancement to the highest judicial honors of the state.”

From the lips of Samuel Knox, of the St. Louis bar, we have this testimony as to the remarkable extent and versatility of Roswell M. Field's talents:

“Uniting great industry and acquirements with the most brilliant wit and genius, well and accurately informed on all subjects, both in science and art; endowed with a memory that retained whatever it received, with quick and clear perceptions, the choicest, most felicitous, and forcible language in which to clothe his thoughts, no one could doubt his meaning or withhold the tribute of wonder at his power.”

[Illustration: CHARLES KELLOGG FIELD.]

To clinch the evidence as to the source from which Eugene Field derived pretty nearly everything that won for him such meed of fame as fell to his lot, let me quote from an interview with Melvin L. Gray, his guardian and foster-father, printed in the Helena Independent, September 6th, 1895, shortly before his idol's death:

“If I had never believed in the influence of heredity before, I would now, after having known Eugene Field and his father before him. The father was a lawyer of wonderful ability, but he was particularly distinguished by his keen wit, his intense appreciation of the humorous side of life, and his fondness for rare first editions of literary works. He was a profound student, and found much time to cultivate the fairer qualities that some lawyers neglect in the busy round of their profession. Eugene is not a lawyer, but he has his father's tastes, his father's keen wit, and much of the same fineness of character and literary ability.”

“Another point of similarity is found in Eugene's neglect of financial matters. In his youth the father was equally negligent, although he did subsequently grow more thrifty, and when he died left the boys a little patrimony. As executor I apportioned the money as directed. Both the boys spent it freely while it lasted.”

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I find no trace in the father of what, all through life, was the pre-eminent characteristic of Eugene, the inveterate painstaking, mirth-compelling practical-joker. But in Brattleboro, Newfane, and throughout Vermont everybody says, "That's jest like his uncle Charles Kellogg. There was never such another for jest foolin'. He'd rather play a hoax on the parson that would embarrass him in the face of his congregation than eat." When they were boys, it was Charles that led Roswell into all kinds of mischief. "Uncle Charles Kellogg"—they always give him the benefit of the second name in Brattleboro—had a reputation for wit and never-ending badinage throughout the neighborhood that still survives and leaves no room to question whence Eugene inherited his unquenchable passion "for jest foolin'."

CHAPTER IV

BIRTH AND EARLY YOUTH

For nine years after moving to St. Louis his profession was the sole mistress of Roswell Field's "laborious days" and bachelor nights. Almost coincident with his becoming interested in the case of the slave, Dred Scott, he met, and more to the purpose of this narrative, became interested in Miss Frances Reed, then of St. Louis, but whose parents hailed from Windham County, Vermont. Whether their common nativity, or the fact that her father was a professional musician, first brought them together, the memory of St. Louis does not disclose. Miss Reed was a young woman of unusual personal charm. All accounts agree that she was quiet and refined in her ways and yet possessed that firmness of mind that is the salt of a quiet nature. They were married in May, 1848, and in the love and domestic happiness of his mature manhood, Roswell Field found the sweet balm for the bitterness that followed from his youthful romance and the nullification of the Putney marriage.

Of this union six children were born in the eight years of Mrs. Field's wedded life, only two of whom, Eugene, the second, and Roswell, survived babyhood. There is some uncertainty as to the exact date and location of Eugene's birth. When his father was married he took his bride home to a house on Collins Street, which, under Time's transmuting and ironical fingers, has since become a noisy boiler-shop. There their first child was born. Subsequently they moved to the house, No. 634 South Fifth Street (now Broadway), which is one in the middle of a block of houses pointed out in St. Louis as the birthplace of Eugene Field. Although Eugene himself went with the photographer and pointed out the house, his brother Roswell strenuously maintains that Eugene was born before the family moved to the Walsh row, so-called, and that to the boiler-shop belongs the honor of having heard the first lullabies that greeted the ears of their greatest master.

[Illustration: EUGENE FIELD'S MOTHER. *From a daguerreotype taken a year or two before his birth.*]

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Roswell's view receives negative corroboration from the testimony of Mrs. Temperance Moon, of Farmington, Utah, who for a time lived in their father's family. Under date of February 25th, 1901, Mrs. Moon wrote to me:

"I can give you very little information in regard to Mr. Field's place of birth. It was on Third Street. I do not remember the names of the cross streets, I think Cherry was one. Eugene was four months old when I went to live with them. I stayed until the family went east for the summer. Mrs. Field's sister was living with them. Her name was Miss Arabella Reed. When they came back Roswell was a few months old. They went to live on Fifth Street in a three-story house. Mrs. Field sent word for me to come and take care of Eugene. I was twelve years old. She gave me full charge of him. I was very proud of the charge. He was a noble child. I loved him as a dear brother. He took great delight in hearing me read any kind of children's stories and fairy tales. His mother was a lovely woman. I have a book and a picture Eugene sent to me. The picture is of him and his mother when he was only six months old."

Equal and illusive doubt hangs over the date of Eugene Field's birth. Was it September 2d or 3d, 1850? In his "Auto-Analysis," of which we shall hear more further along, Field himself gives preference to the latter figure. But as his preference more than half the time went by the rule of contraries, that would be prima-facie evidence that he was born on the earlier date. There again the testimony of the younger brother is to the effect that in their youth the anniversary of Eugene's birth was held to be September 2d. Their father said he could not reconcile his mind to the thought that one of his children was born on so memorable an anniversary as September 3d, the day of Cromwell's death. I have little doubt that Field himself fostered the irrepressible conflict of dates, on the theory that two birthdays a year afforded a double opportunity to playfully remind his friends of the pleasing duty of an interchange of tokens on such anniversaries. If they forgot September 2d, he could jog their memories that Cromwell's death on September 3d, two centuries before, was no excuse for ignoring his birth on September 3d, 1850.

Whether born on the anniversary of Cromwell's death or in the boiler-shop, no stories of the youthful precocity of Eugene Field survive to entertain us or to suggest that he gave early indication of the possession either of unusual talent or of that unique personality that were to distinguish him from the thousands born every day.

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But Eugene and Roswell, Jr., were not long to know the watchful tenderness and ambitious solicitude of that “mother love” of which the elder has so sweetly sung. In November, 1856, when Eugene was six years old, their mother died and their father’s thoughts instinctively turned to his sister, hoping to find with her, amid scenes familiar to his own youth, a home and affectionate care for his motherless boys. How the early loss of his mother affected the life of Eugene Field it is impossible to tell. Not until the boy of six whom she left had become a man of forty did he attempt to pay a tribute of filial love to her memory. The following lines, under the simple title, “To My Mother,” first appeared in his “Sharps and Flats” column, October 25th, 1890. It was reprinted in his “Second Book of Verse.” The opening lines summon up a tender picture of a “grace that is dead”:

How fair you are, my mother! Ah, though 'tis many a year Since you were here, Still do I see your beauteous face And with the glow Of your dark eyes cometh a grace Of long ago.

The Mistress French of our earlier acquaintance, who was a widow when we last knew her in Newfane, had married again and, as Mistress Thomas Jones, had moved with her daughter, Mary Field French, to Amherst, Mass. To the home of Mrs. Jones and the loving care of Miss French, Eugene and Roswell, Jr., were entrusted. Miss French was at this time a young woman, a spinster—Eugene delighted to call her—of about thirty years. His old Munson tutor thus describes her:

“Mary Field French, a daughter of Mrs. Jones by her first husband, was a lady of strong mind, and much culture, with a sound judgment and decision of character and very gracious manners. She was always sociable and agreeable and so admirably adapted to the charge of the two brothers.” They retained through manhood the warmest affection for this cousin-mother, and never wearied in showing toward her the grateful devotion of loyal sons.

“Here,” continues Dr. Tufts, “in this charming home, under the best of New England influences and religious instruction, with nothing harsh or repulsive, the boys could not have found a more congenial home. Indeed, few mothers are able or even capable of doing so much for their own children as Miss French did for these two brothers, watching over them incessantly, yet not spoiling them by weak indulgence or repelling them by harsh discipline.”

[Illustration: EUGENE FIELD’S COUSINS, MARY FIELD FRENCH AND HER YOUNGER HALF SISTER, AUGUSTA JONES. *From a daguerreotype taken before Eugene and Roswell became members of Miss French’s family in Amherst, on the death of their mother.*]

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Here it was that Eugene was brought up in the “nurture and admonition of the Lord,” as he would often declare with a mock severity of tone, that left a mixed impression as to the beneficence of the nurture and the abiding quality of the admonition. Here he spent his school days, not in acquiring a broad or deep basis for future scholarship, but in studying the ways and whims of womankind, in practising the subtile arts whereby the boy of from six to fifteen attains a tyrannous mastery over the hearts of a feminine household, and in securing the leadership among the daring spirits of his own age and sex, for whom he was early able to furnish a continuous programme of entertainment, adventure, and mischief.

Of this period of Eugene Field’s life we get the truest glimpse through the eyes of his brother, who has written appreciatively of their boyhood spent in Amherst. “His boyhood,” writes Roswell, “was similar to that of other boys brought up with the best surroundings in a Massachusetts village, where the college atmosphere prevailed. He had his boyish pleasures and his trials, his share of that queer mixture of nineteenth century worldliness and almost austere Puritanism, which is yet characteristic of many New England families.”

If the reader wishes to know more of the New England atmosphere, in which Eugene Field was permitted to have pretty much his own sweet way by his cousin and aunt, let him have recourse to Mrs. Earle’s “The Sabbath in Puritan New England,” which I find in my library commended to my perusal, “with Eugene Field’s love, December 25th, 1891”—and to other books by the same author. In a letter to Mrs. Earle, from which I quoted in the opening paragraph of this narrative, I find the following reference to the period of his life which we are now considering:

“Fourteen years of my life were spent in Newfane, Vt., and Amherst, Mass. My lovely old grandmother was one of the very elect. How many times have I carried her footstove for her and filled it in the vestry-room. I have frozen in the old pew while grandma kept nice and warm and nibbled lozenges and cassia cakes during meeting. I remember the old sounding-board. There was no melodeon in that meeting-house; and the leader of the choir pitched the tune with a tuning-fork. As a boy I used to play hi-spy in the horse-shed. But I am not so very old—no, a man is still a boy at forty, isn’t he?”

[Illustration: THE FIELD HOMESTEAD AT NEWFANE, VT.]

Eugene Field would have been a boy at fifty and at eighty had he lived, and he was very much of a boy at the period of which he wrote to Mrs. Earle. I have no doubt that he was a very circumspect lad while under the loving yet stern glance of that dear old grandmother, in whose kindly yet dignified presence three generations of Fields moved with varying emotions of love and circumspection. “Her husband” (General Martin Field of our acquaintance), wrote “Uncle Charles Kellogg,” “was genial

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and social, full of humor and mirth, oftentimes filling the house with his jocund laugh.” She, however, “true to her refined womanly instinct, her sense of propriety, rarely disturbed by his merry and harmless jests, with great discretion pursued ‘the even tenor of her way.’ Patiently and with unfaltering devotion to the higher and nobler purposes of life, she always maintained her self-possession, strenuously avoided all levity and frivolity, rarely relaxed the gravity of her deportment, and never failed in the end of controlling both husband and household.”

Eugene’s own picture of his grandmother is contained in the following passage in an article contributed by him to the Ladies’ Home Journal:

“Grandma was a pillar in the Congregational Church. At the decline and disintegration of the Universalist society, she rejoiced cordially as if a temple of Baal or an idol of Ashtaroath had been overturned. Yes, grandma was Puritanical—not to the extent of persecution, but a Puritan in the severity of her faith and in the exacting nicety of her interpretation of her duties to God and mankind. Grandma’s Sunday began at six o’clock Saturday evening; by that hour her house was swept and garnished, and her lamps trimmed, every preparation made for a quiet, reverential observance of the Sabbath Day. There was no cooking on Sunday. At noon Mrs. Deacon Ranney and other old ladies used to come from church with grandma to eat luncheon and discuss the sermon and suggest deeds of piety for the ensuing week. I remember Mrs. Deacon Ranney and her frigid companions very distinctly. They never smiled and they wore austere bombazines that rustled and squeaked dolorously. Mrs. Deacon Ranney seldom noticed me further than to regard me with a look that seemed to stigmatize me as an incipient vessel of wrath that was not to be approved of, and I never liked Mrs. Deacon Ranney after I heard her reminding grandma one day that Solomon had truly said, ‘spare the rod and spoil the child.’ I still think ill of Mrs. Deacon Ranney for having sought to corrupt dear old grandma’s gentle nature with any such incendiary suggestions. The meeting-house was cold and draughty, and the seats, with their straight backs, were oh, so hard. Grandma’s pew was near the pulpit. I remember now how ashamed I used to be to carry her footstove all the way up that long aisle for her—I was such a foolish little boy then—and now, ah me, how ready and glad and proud I should be to do that service for dear old grandma!” When grandma went to meeting she carried a lovely big black velvet bag; it had a bouquet wrought in beads of subdued color upon it, and it hung by two sombre silk puckering ribbons over grandma’s arm. In the bag grandma carried a supply of crackers and peppermint lozenges, and upon these she would nibble in meeting whenever she felt that feeling of goneness in the pit of her stomach, which I was told old ladies sometimes

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suffer with. It was proper enough, I was assured, for old ladies to nibble at crackers and peppermint lozenges in meeting, but that such a proceeding would be very wicked for a little boy."

From which it might appear that the atmosphere of Newfane, under the grave and serious deportment of his grandmother, must have been a change from the freedom Eugene and his brother enjoyed under the fond rule of Miss French at Amherst. But when I was in Newfane in 1899 I was informed by a dear old lady in bombazine, who remembered their visits distinctly, that "Eugene and Roswell were wild boys. Not bad, but just tew full of old Nick for anything."

[Illustration: THE HOMESTEAD AT AMHERST, MASS. *Now owned by Mr. Hiram Eaton of New York.*]

It was in Amherst, however, and not in Newfane, from Cousin Mary, and not from his dear Grandmother Esther, that Eugene got the New England "bent" in his Missouri mind. It is hard to separate the fact from the fancy in his story of "My Grandmother." His youth from 1856 to 1865 was lived in Amherst. His only visit to the Field homestead in Newfane was when he was nine years old. And of this he has written, "we stayed there seven months and the old lady got all the grandsons she wanted. She did not invite us to repeat the visit." He also confessed that all his love for nature dated from that visit. As a boy he would never have been permitted to indulge the fondness for animal pets under "the dark penetrating eyes" of his grandmother, that was tolerated and became a life-habit by the "gracious love" of Mary Field French. Of this fondness for pets, Roswell has written that it amounted to a passion. "But unlike other boys he seemed to carry his pets into a higher sphere and to give them personality. For each pet, whether dog, cat, bird, goat, or squirrel—he had the family distrust of a horse—he not only had a name, but it was his delight to fancy that each possessed a peculiar dialect of human speech, and each he addressed in the humorous manner conceived. When in childhood he was conducting a poultry annex to the homestead, each chicken was properly instructed to respond to a peculiar call, and Finniken, Minniken, Winniken, Dump, Poog, Boog seemed to recognize immediately the queer intonations of their master with an intelligence that is not usually accorded to chickens."

I cannot forbear to introduce here a characteristic bit of evidence from Eugene Field's own pen of the survival of the passion for pets to which his brother testifies:

"It is only under stress," said he in his allotted column in the Chicago Record of January 9th, 1892, "nay, under distress, that the mysterious veil of the editorial-room may properly be thrown aside and the secret thereof disclosed. It is under a certain grievous distress that we make this statement now: "For a number of months the silent partner in the construction of this sporadic column

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of 'Sharps and Flats' has been a little fox terrier given to the writer hereof by his friend, Mr. Will J. Davis. We named our little companion Jessie, and our attachment to her was wholly reciprocated by Jessie herself, although (and we make this confession very shamefacedly) our enthusiasm for Jessie was by no means shared by the prudent housewife in charge of the writer's domestic affairs. Jessie contributed to and participated in our work in this wise: She would sit and admiringly watch the writer at his work, wagging her abridged tail cordially whenever he bestowed a casual glance upon her, threatening violence to every intruder, warning her master of the approach of every garrulous visitor, and oftentimes, when she felt lonely, insisted on climbing up into her master's lap and slumbering there while he wrote and wrote away. We have tried our poems on Jessie, and she always liked them; leastwise she always wagged her tail approvingly and smiled her flatteries as only a very intelligent little dog can. Some folk think that our poetry drove Jessie away from home, but we know better; Jessie herself would deny that malicious imputation were she here now and could she speak. "To this little companion we became strongly, perhaps foolishly, attached. She walked with us by day, hunting rats and playing famously every variety of intelligent antics. Whither we went she went, and at night she shared our couch with us. Though only nine months old Jessie stole into this life of ours so very far that years seemed hardly to compass the period and honesty of our friendship. "Well, last Tuesday night Jessie disappeared—vanished as mysteriously as if the earth had opened up and swallowed her. She had been playing with a discreet dog friend in Fullerton Avenue, and that was the last seen of her! Where can she have gone? It is very lonesome without Jessie. Moreover there are poems to be read for her approval before they can be printed; the great cause of literature waits upon Jessie. She must be found and restored to her proper sphere. "Jessie perhaps was not beautiful, yet she was fair to her master's eyes. She was white with yellow ears and a brownish blaze over her left eye and warty cheek. She weighed perhaps twenty pounds (for Jessie never had dyspepsia), and one mark you surely could tell her by was the absence of a nail from her left forepaw, the honorable penalty of an encounter with an enraged setting hen in our barn last month. "Jessie's master is not rich, for the poetry that fox terriers approve is not remunerative; but that master has accumulated (by means of industrious application to his work and his friends) the sum of \$20, which he will cheerfully pay to the man, woman, or child who will bring Jessie back again. For he is a weak human creature, is Jessie's master, in his loneliness, without his faithful, admiring little dumb friend."

Two days later Field printed the following letter and his answer thereto, both written by the same hand in his column:

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CHICAGO, January 10th.

To the Editor: I am very sorry for the gentleman who writes your Sharps and Flats, for I know what it is to lose a little dog. I had one once and some boy I guess took it off and never brought it back again. I have got a maltese cat and four beautiful kittens, and should like to send the gentleman one of the kittens if he wants one. Maybe he would get to like the kitten as much as he did the little dog. Respectfully, your little friend,

EDITH LONG.

"Many thanks to our charming little correspondent; she has a gentle heart, we know. What havoc one of those mischievous creatures would make! In the first place it would accomplish the destruction of these little canaries of ours which now flit about this lovely disordered room, perching confidently upon folios and bric-a-brac and hopping blithely over the manuscripts and papers on the table. In the basement against the furnace, three beautiful fleecy little chickens have just hatched out. How long do you suppose it would be before that wicked little kitten discovered and compassed the demolition of those innocent baby fowls? Then again there are rabbits in the stable and very tame pigeons and the tiniest of bantams. It would be very dreadful to introduce a truculent kitten (and all felines are naturally truculent) into such society. And our blood fairly congeals when we think that perhaps (oh, fearful possibility) that kitten might nose out and wantonly destroy the too lovely butterflies stored away in yonder closet, which we have appropriately named the cage of gloom.

"Miss Edith must keep her kitten and may she have the pleasure of its pretty antics. However, she must bear this in mind, that sooner or later our pets come to grief.

"Very, very many years ago, we read and cried over a little book written by Grace Greenwood and entitled 'The History of My Pets.' Even as a child we wondered why it was that evil invariably befell the pets of youth. "We all know that most little folks are tender-hearted, yet there are some who seem indifferent to pets, to have little sympathy with the pathos of dumb animals. And we have so often wondered whether after all these latter did not get more of pleasure or should we say less of pain out of life than the others. The tender heart seldom hardens; in maturer years its comprehensions and sympathies broaden, and this of course involves pain. Are the delights of sympathy a fair offset to the pains thereof?"

The boy at Amherst was the father of the man at forty-two. It was to the prototype of "The Bench-Legged Fyce," known in Miss French's household as "Dooley," that the boy Eugene attributed his first verse, a parody on the well-known lines, "Oh, had I the wings of a dove!" Dooley's song ran:

*Oh, had I wings like a dove I would fly
Away from this world of fleas;
I'd fly all round Miss Emerson's yard
And light on Miss Emerson's trees.*

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It was rank disloyalty to the memory of “Dooley” to rename the bench-legged fyce “Sooner” and locate the scene of his “chronic repose” in St. Jo rather than under the flea-proof tree of Mrs. Emerson in Amherst. But who regrets the poetic license as he reads:

We all hev our choice, an' you like the rest, Allow that dorg which you've got is the best; I wouldn't give much for the boy 'at grows up With no friendship subsistin' 'tween him and a pup; When a fellow gits old—I tell you it's nice To think of his youth and his bench-legged fyce!

Although Eugene Field never forgot or forgave the terrors of the New England Sabbath, its strict observance, its bad singing, doleful prayers and interminable sermons, the impress of those all-day sessions in church and Sunday-school was never eradicated from his life and writings. Nothing else influenced his work or affected his style as much as the morals and the literature of the Bible and the sacred songs that were lined out week after week from the pulpit under which he literally and figuratively sat when a youth. “If,” he has said, “I could be grateful to New England for nothing else I should bless her forevermore for pounding me with the Bible and the Spelling-Book.”

There is in the possession of the family the “Notes of a Sermon by E.P. Field,” said to have been written by Eugene at the age of nine, when he affected the middle initial of P in honor of Wendell Phillips. It was more probably written when he was twelve or fourteen, as he showed at nine none of the signs of precocity which such a composition indicates. The youthful Channing took for his text the fifteenth verse of the thirteenth chapter of Proverbs: “Good understanding giveth favor: but the way of transgressors is hard.” Upon this he expounded as follows:

“The life of a Christian is often compared to a race that is hard and to a battle in which a man must fight hard to win, these comparisons have prevented many from becoming Christians.

“But the Bible does not compare the Christian’s path as one of hard labor. But Solomon says wisdom’s ways are ways of pleasantness and her paths are peace. Under the word transgressor are included all those that disobey their maker, or, in shorter words, the ungodly. Every person looking around him will see many who are transgressors and whose lot is very hard.” I remark secondly that conscience makes the way of transgressors hard; for every act of pleasure, every act of guilt his conscience smites him. The last of his stay on earth will appear horrible to the beholder. Sometimes, however, he will be stayed in his guilt. A death in a family of some favorite object, or be attacked by some disease himself, is brought to the portals of the grave. Then for a little time, perhaps, he is stayed in his wickedness, but before long he returns to his worldly lusts. Oh, it is indeed

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hard for a sinner to go down into perhaps perdition over all the obstacles which God has placed in his path. But many, I am afraid, do go down into perdition, for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leadeth to destruction, and many there be that go in after it. "Suppose now there was a fearful precipice and to allure you there your enemies should scatter flowers on its dreadful edge, would you if you knew that while you were strolling about on that awful rock that night would settle down on you and that you would fall from that giddy, giddy height, would you, I say, go near that dreadful rock? Just so with the transgressor, he falls from that height just because he wishes to appear good in the sight of the world. But what will a man gain if he gain the whole world and lose his own soul."

Whenever this was written it shows on its face that it is more an effort of memory or the effect of one of the fearful sermons of fifty years ago on the impressionable mind of youth, than the original production of a precocious boy struggling with the insoluble problem of life and judgment to come. Mark how the stock words of the pulpiteer, "transgressor," "worldly lusts," "dreadful," "awful," "perdition" stalk fiercely through the sermon of the youthful saint or sinner!

Roswell Field says that his brother without instruction early acquired the habit of drawing amusing pictures of his playmates and his pets, and that later in life he gave it as his honest opinion that he would have been much more successful as a caricaturist than as a writer. But Eugene's drawings at all periods were never more than grotesque or fanciful illustrations of the whimsical ideas he harbored respecting everything that came to his attention.

In after life Eugene Field gave frequent proof that he cherished contradictory sentiments toward Vermont and New England. One view was tinged, I think, with the recollection of the wrong his father suffered at the hands of the Green Mountain courts, and reflects the general tenor of his comment whenever Vermont men or affairs came under discussion in the public press. It is illustrated in the following paragraph:

The Vermont papers agreed that Colonel Aldace Walker is the very best man in Vermont for the Inter-State Commerce Commission. This may be true. At the same time, however, we fail to see what interest Vermont can possibly take in inter-state commerce. She has no commerce of her own, and she probably never will have. There is a bobbin factory at Williamsville, and a melodeon factory at Brattleboro, but the commerce resulting from them is not worthy of mention. There is talk about the maple-sugar that Vermont exports, but we have noticed that all the "genuine Vermont maple-sugar" in the Western market comes from the South, and is about as succulent as the heel of a gum-boot. In all the State of Vermont there is but one railroad, the Vermont Central; it begins at Grout's Corner,

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Mass., and runs in a bee-line north until it reaches the southern end of the Montreal bridge. This remarkable road has a so-called branch operating once per week between White River Junction and Montpelier, and a triweekly branch extending to Burlington. Montpelier is the home of Hiram Atkins, the famous "Nestor of Checkerberry Journalism," and White River Junction is the whistling station and water-tank from which our country gets its election returns every four years. Burlington is located on Lake Champlain, and contains the summer residence of that grand old survivor of the glacial period, George F. Edmunds. Thus in a brief paragraph have we compressed all that can be said of the commerce and the railways of Vermont.

The other view is softened with the haze that hangs over the scenes of childhood in the minds of all men of feeling when interpreted by an artist in expressing the thought "that unbidden rises and passes in a tear." It is from Field's little-known memorial to Mrs. Melvin L. Gray, written while he was in Southern California:

The quiet beauty of these scenes recalls a time which, in my life, is so long ago that I feel strangely reverential when I speak of it. I find myself thinking of my boyhood, and of the hills and valleys and trees and flowers and birds I knew when the morning of my life was fresh and full of exuberance. Those years were spent among the Pelham hills, very, very far from here; but memory o'erleaps the mountain ranges, the leagues upon leagues of prairie, the mighty rivers, the forest, the farming lands, o'erleaps them all; and to-day, by that same sweet magic that instantaneously undoes the years and space, I seem to be among the Pelham hills again. The yonder glimpse of the Pacific becomes the silver thread of the Connecticut, seen, not over miles of orange-groves, but over broad acres of Indian corn; and instead of the pepper and eucalyptus, the lemon and the palm, I see (or I seem to see) the maple once more, and the elm and the chestnut trees, the shagbark walnut, the hickory, and the birch. In those days, these rugged mountains of this south land were unknown to me; and the Pelham hills were full of marvel and delight, with their tangled pathways and hidden stores of wintergreen and wild strawberries. Furtive brooks led the little boy hither and thither in his quest for trout and dace, while to the gentler-minded the modest flowers of the wild-wood appealed with singular directness. A partridge rose now and then from the thicket and whirled away, and with startled eyes the brown thrush peered out from the bushes. I see these pleasant scenes again, and I hear again the beloved sounds of old; and so with reverence and with welcoming I take up my task, for it was among these same Pelham hills that the dear lady of whom I am to speak was born and spent her childhood.

CHAPTER V

EDUCATION

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There was more truth than epigrammatic novelty in Eugene Field's declaration that his education began when he fancied he had left it off for the serious business of life. Throughout his boyhood he was far from a hardy youth. He always gave the impression of having overgrown his strength, so that delicate health, and not indisposition to study, has been assigned as the excuse for his backwardness in "book larnin'" when it was decided to send him away from the congenial distractions of Amherst to the care of the Rev. James Tufts of Monson.

Monson is a very prettily situated Massachusetts town, about fifteen miles, as the crow flies, east of Springfield, and not more than twenty-five miles south by east of Amherst. It boasted then and still boasts one of the best equipped boys' academies in New England. It was not to the tender mercies of this academy, however, that Eugene was entrusted, but to the private tutorship of Mr. Tufts, whose life and character justify the tribute of Roswell Field that he is "one of those noble instructors of the blessed old school who are passing away from the arena of education in America." He is now, in 1901, in his ninetieth year, and is always spoken of among his neighbors as the "grand old man of Monson." From his own lips, accompanied by the lively comments of Mrs. Tufts, and from a loving communication written by him to the Springfield Republican shortly after Eugene Field's death I have gleaned the general facts of Eugene Field's school-days at Monson.

[Illustration: A BIRD'S EYE VIEW OF MONSON, MASS.]

It was in the Fall of 1865 that Eugene became one of a class of six boys in the private school of Mr. Tufts. This school was chosen because Mr. Tufts had known the boy's parents and grandparents and felt a real interest in the lad. He would not have received the proper care at a large school, where "he would be likely to get into trouble with his love of fun and mischief." The house in which Eugene became as one of the family is situated about a mile from the village and faces the post road, on the farther side of which is a mill-pond, where both Eugene and Roswell came near making the writing of this memoir unnecessary by going over the dam in a rude boat of their own construction. Happily the experience resulted in nothing more serious than a thorough fright and a still more thorough ducking.

Back of the Tufts homestead rise some beautifully wooded hills, where Field and his schoolmates sought refuge from the gentle wrath of Mr. Tufts over their not infrequent delinquencies. The story is told in Monson that the boys, under the leadership of Field, built a "moated castle" of tree-trunks and brushwood in a well-nigh inaccessible part of these woods. Thence they sallied forth on their imaginary forays and thither they retired when in disgrace with Mr. Tufts. Around this retreat they dug a deep trench, which they covered artfully with boughs and dead leaves. Then they beguiled

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their reverend preceptor into chasing them to their “mountain fastness.” Lightly they skipped across the concealed moat on the only firm ground they had purposely left, leaving him in the moment of exultant success to plunge neck deep into a tangled mass of brushwood and mud. In such playful ways as these Field endeared himself to the frequent forgiveness of Mr. Tufts. “It was impossible,” said Mr. Tufts to me, “to cherish anger against a pupil whose contrition was as profuse and whimsical as his transgressions were frequent. The boys were boys.”

Of Eugene’s education when he came to Monson Mr. Tufts testifies: “In his studies he was about fitted for an ordinary high school, except in arithmetic. He had read a little Latin—enough to commence Caesar. I found him about an average boy in his lessons, not dull, but not a quick and ready scholar like his father, who graduated from Middlebury College at the age of fifteen, strong and athletic. He did not seem to care much for his books or his lessons anyway, but was inclined to get along as easily as he could, partly on account of his delicate health, which made close study irksome, and partly because his mind was very juvenile and undeveloped. His health improved gradually, while his interest in his studies increased slowly but steadily. Judge Forbes, of Westboro, for a time his room-mate and a remarkable scholar, remarked on reading his journal that his chum occasionally took up his book for study when his teacher came around, though he was not always particular which side up his book was. And so it was through life.”

But Eugene did improve in his scholarship, and during the last six months before leaving to enter Williams College, in 1868, Mr. Tufts says he did seem “to catch something of the spirit of Cicero and Virgil and Homer [where was Horace?], and to catch a little ambition for an education.” His gentle preceptor thus summed up the characteristics of the youth he was trying to fit for college:

“Eugene gave little if any indications of becoming a poet, or such a poet as he was, or even a superior writer, in his youth. He was always, however bright and lively in conversation, abounding in wit, self-possessed, and never laughing at his own jokes, showing, too, some of that exhaustless fountain of humor in which he afterward excelled. But he did not like confinement or close application, nor did he have patience to correct and improve what he wrote, as he afterward did when his taste was more cultivated. In declamation Eugene always excelled, reciting with marked effect ‘Spartacus,’ ‘The Soldier of the Legion,’ and ‘The Dream of Clarence’ from Shakespeare. He inherited from his father a rich, strong, musical, and sympathetic voice, which made him a pleasant speaker and afterward a successful public reader. He very naturally excelled in conversation at table and in getting up little comic almanacs, satirizing the boys, but always in good-humor, never descending to anything bitter or vulgar. Indeed, in all his fun, he showed ever a certain purity and nobility of character.”

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On one occasion, Eugene wearied of the persistent efforts of Mr. Tufts to place his feet on the first rung of the ladder to learning, and started off afoot for his home in Amherst. He followed the railway track, counting the ties for twenty-five miles, and arrived, thoroughly exhausted, full of contrition, and ready to take the first train back to school. This was probably the most severe physical effort of Eugene Field's life.

Mr. Tufts says that Field was "by nature and by his training, too, respectful toward religion and religious people, being at one time here [Monson] considerably moved and interested personally in a religious awakening, and speaking earnestly in meeting and urging the young to a religious life. Great credit for the remarkable success of Eugene is due to his Aunt Jones, Miss Mary French, and his guardian, Professor John Burgess, who were a continual and living influence about him until he arrived at maturity."

In 1868, at the age when his father was admitted to the bar of Vermont, Eugene Field, according to Mr. Tufts, was barely able to pass the examination for entrance at Williams "with some conditions." The only evidence preserved in the books of the college that he passed at all is the following entry:

Eugene Field, aged 18, September 5, 1868, son of R.M. Field,
St. Louis.

[Illustration: THE REV. JAMES TUFTS.]

Among the professors and residents of Williamstown there is scarcely a tradition or trace of his presence. He did not fit into the treadmill of daily lessons and lectures. He was impatient of routine and discipline. There is a story extant, which is a self-evident fabrication, that President Mark Hopkins, meeting him on the street one day, asked him how he was getting along with his studies. Field replied that he was doing very well. Thereupon President Hopkins, in kindly humor, remarked: "I am glad to hear it, for, remember, you have the reputation of three universities to maintain." This apocryphal story is greatly relished in Williamstown, where, among the professors, there seems to linger a strange feeling of resentment that Field was not recognized as possessing the budding promise that is better worth cultivating than the mediocrity of the ninety-and-nine orderly youths who pursue the uneventful tenor of college life to a diploma—and are never heard of afterward. There is a bare possibility, however, that President Hopkins might have referred to the fact that Eugene's grandfather held an A.B. from Williams and the honorary degree of A.M. from Dartmouth, while his father was an alumnus of Middlebury. It is more probably an after—and a merry—thought built upon Field's own unfinished career at Williams, Knox, and the University of Missouri.

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From personal inquiry at Williamstown I find that none of the professors at Williams saw an encouraging gleam of aptitude for anything in the big-eyed, shambling youth whom Mr. Tufts had assiduously coached to meet the requirements of matriculation. There is a shadowy tradition that he did fairly well in his Latin themes when the subject suited his fancy, but his fancy more often led him to a sporting resort, kept by an ex-pugilist named Pettit, where he took a hand in billiards and made awkward essays with the boxing-gloves. Of course there is the inevitable yarn of a college town that he became so conceited over his skill in the manly art that he ventured to "stand up" before Pettit, to the bloody disfigurement of his countenance and the humiliation of his pride. If this is true, the lesson lasted him all his life, for a less combative adult than Eugene Field never graduated from an American college. He had a physical as well as a moral antipathy to personal participation in anything involving bodily danger or violence.

Even then Field possessed the wit and the plentiful lack of reverence for the conventionalities of life that must have rendered him both intolerable and incomprehensible to a body of serious-minded and necessarily conventional professors. The very traits that subsequently made him the most entertaining comrade in the world provoked only consternation and uneasiness at Williams. This eventually led President Hopkins to inform Mr. Tufts privately that it might be well for his pupil, as certainly it would conduce to the orderly life of Williamstown, if he would run up from Monson and persuade Eugene to return home with him. There was no dismissal, rustication, or official reprimand of Eugene Field by the ever-honored President Hopkins. Field simply faded out of the annals and class of 1872, as if he had never been entered at Williams.

Memories of Eugene Field are not as thick at Williamstown as blackberries on the Pelham hills. President Carter does not cherish them kindly because, perhaps, on the occasion of his appointment, Field gravely discussed his qualifications for the chair once occupied by Mark Hopkins as resting upon his contribution of "a small but active pellet" to the pharmaceutical equipment of his countrymen, famed for its efficacy to cure all disorders of mind and body "while you sleep."

"Hy." Walden, much in demand as an expressman, remembers Field as a somewhat reckless fellow and "dare-devil," and is authority for the story of Field's discomfiture in the boxing bout with the redoubtable Pettit.

Old Tom McMahon, who has been a familiar character to the students of Williams for nearly two generations, has a hazy recollection of the eccentric Eugene who flitted across the college campus a third of a century ago. He says that, if he "remembers right, Mr. Field was not one of the gentlemen who cared much for his clothes," but he "guessed he was made careless like, and in some ways he was a fine young man."

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[Illustration: WILLIAMS COLLEGE BUILDINGS, WILLIAMSTOWN, MASS.]

The most valuable glimpse of Field at Williams is contained in the following letter written by Solomon B. Griffin, the managing editor of the Springfield Republican for many years, with whom I have had some correspondence in respect to the matter referred to therein. He not only knew Field at Williamstown, but was one of his life-long friends and warmest admirers. After a few introductory words, under date of Springfield, February 4th, 1901, Mr. Griffin wrote:

Yes, I was of the class of 1872, but Field flitted before I became connected with it. But Williamstown was my birthplace and home and I struck up an acquaintance with him at Smith's college bookstore and the post-office. Field was raw and not a bit deferential to established customs, and so the secret-society men were not attracted to him. The "trotting" or preliminary attentions to freshmen constitute a great and revered feature of college life. When I saw Field "trotting" a lank and gawky freshman for the "Mills Theological Society," the humor of it appealed to one soaked in the traditions of a college town, and we "became acquainted." Field left the class about as I came in. It is not remarkable that Tom McMahon has no clear recollection of Field, who was in college only about six months and was not a fraternity man. There are so many coming and going! Nor that the faculty should be mindful of the lawless, irresponsible boy, and not of the genius that developed on its own lines and was never conventionalized but always remained a sinner however brilliant, and a flayer of good men unblest with a saving sense of humor. If there is any kind thought for me in my old home it is because I did what Field couldn't do, paid outward respect to the environment. It was possible for me to see his point of view and theirs—to them irreconcilable, and to him also.

Sincerely yours,

S.B. GRIFFIN.

Mr. Tufts's memorandum-book shows that Eugene returned to Monson April 27th, 1889, so his experience, if not his education, at Williams covered almost eight months of an impressionable period of his life. It is interesting to record the comment of Mrs. Tufts on the return of the wanderer to her indulgent care. "He was too smart for the professors at Williams," said she; "because they did not understand him, they could not pardon his eccentricities." That she did understand her husband's favorite pupil is evidenced in the following brief description, given off-hand to the writer: "Eugene was not much of a student, but very much of an irrepressible boy. There was no malice in his pranks, only the inherited disposition to tease somebody and everybody."

On July 5th, 1869, Eugene was summoned to St. Louis by the serious illness of his father, who died July 12th.

Thus ended his education, so far as it was to be affected by the environments and instructors of New England. Thenceforth he was destined to be a western man, with an ineradicable tang of Puritan prejudices and convictions cropping out unexpectedly and incongruously in all he thought and wrote.

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In the autumn of 1869 Eugene entered the sophomore class at Knox College, Galesburg, Ill., where Professor John William Burgess, who had been chosen as his guardian, held the chair of logic, rhetoric, English literature, and political science. But his career at Knox was practically a repetition of that at Williams. He chafed under the restraint of set rules and the requirement of attention to studies in which he took no interest. If he had been allowed to choose, he would have devoted his time to reading the Latin classics and declaiming—that is, as much time as he could spare from plaguing the professors and interrupting the studies of his companions by every device of a festive and fertile imagination.

One year of this was enough for the faculty of Knox and for the restless scholar, so in the autumn of 1870 Eugene joined his brother Roswell in the junior class at the University of Missouri. Here Eugene Field ended, without graduating, such education as the school and the university was ever to give him, for in the spring of 1871 he left Columbia for St. Louis, never to return—a student at three universities and a graduate from none.

Of Eugene Field's life in Columbia many stories abound there and throughout Missouri. From the aged and honored historian of the university I have the following testimony as to the relations of the two brothers with that institution, premising it with the fact that all the official records of students were consumed in the fire that visited the university in 1892:

Roswell M. Field attended the university as a freshman in 1868-69, as a sophomore in 1869-70, and as a junior in 1870-71. He was a student of the institution these three sessions only. His brother Eugene Field was a student of the junior class, session 1870-71, and never before or since.

I knew both of them well. Eugene was an inattentive, indifferent student, making poor progress in the studies of the course—a genial, sportive, song-singing, fun-making companion. Nevertheless he was bright, sparkling, entertaining and a leader among “the boys.” In truth he was in intellect above his fellows and a genius along his favorite lines. He was prolific of harmless pranks and his school life was a big joke.

[Illustration: THE OLD KNOX COLLEGE BUILDINGS, GALESBURG. ILL.]

There has been preserved the following specimen of the “rigs” Eugene was in the habit of grinding out at the expense of the faculty—this being aimed at President Daniel Reed (1868-77). The poem is entitled:

BUCEPHALUS: A TAIL.

Twelve by the clock and all is well—
That is, I think so, but who can tell?

So quiet and still the city seems
That even old Luna's brightest beams
Cannot a single soul discover
Upon the streets the whole town over.



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The Marshal smiles a genial smile
And retires to snooze for a little while,
To dream of billies and dirks and slings,
The calaboose and such pleasant things.
The college dig now digs for bed
With bunged-up eyes and aching head,
Conning his lesson o'er and o'er,
Till an audible melodious snore
Tells that he's going the kingdom through
Where Greek's at a discount and Latin, too.

The Doctor, robed in his snowy white,
Gazes out from his window height,
And he bends to the breezes his noble form,
Like a stately oak in a thunderstorm,
And watches his sleek and well-fed cows
At the expense of the college browse.
His prayers are said; out goes the light;
Good-night; O learned pres, good-night.

Half-past five by Ficklin's time
When I again renew my rhyme;
Old Sol is up and the college dig
Resumes his musty, classic gig,
"Caesar venit celere jam."
With here and there an auxiliary—
The Marshal awakes and stalks around
With an air importantly profound,
And seizing on a luckless wight
Who quietly stayed at home all night
On a charge of not preserving order,
Drags him before the just Recorder.

In vain the hapless youth denies it;
A barroom loafer testifies it.
"Fine him," the court-house rabble shout
(This is the latest jury out).
So when his pocketbook is eased
Most righteous justice is appeased.

The Doctor lay in his little bed,
His night-cap 'round his God-like head,
With a blanket thick and snowy sheet
Enveloped his l—— pshaw! and classical feet,



And he cleared his throat and began: "My dear,
As well in Indiana as here—
I always took a morning ride,
With you, my helpmeet, by my side.

"This morning is so clear and cool,
We'll ride before it's time for school.
Holloa, there John! you lazy cuss!
Bring forth my horse, Bucephalus!"
So spake the man of letters. Straight
Black John went through the stable gate,
But soon returned with hair on end,
While terror wings his speed did lend,
And out he sent his piteous wail:
"O boss! Old Bucky's lost his tail!"

Down went the night-cap on the ground,
Hats, boots and clothing flying round;
In vain his helpmeet cried "Hold on!"
He went right through that sable John.
Sing, sing, O Muse, what deeds were done
This morn by God-like Peleus' son;
Descend, O fickle Goddess, urge
My lyre to his bombastic splurge.

Boots and the man I sing, who first
Those Argive machinations cursed;
His swimming eyes did Daniel raise
To that sad tail of other days,
And cried "Alas! what ornery cuss
Has shaved you, my Bucephalus?"
Then turning round he gently sighed,
"We will postpone our morning ride."

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In wrath I smite my quivering lyre,
Come once again, fair Muse, inspire
My song to more heroic acts
Than these poor simple, truthful facts.
Cursed be the man who hatched the plot!
Let dire misfortune be his lot!
Palsied the hand that struck the blow!
Blind be the eyes that saw the show!
Hated the wretch who ruthless bled
This innocent old quadruped.

Subpreps, a word of caution, please;
Better prepare your A, B, C's
Than prowl around at dead of night.
Don't rouse the beast in Daniel's breast;
Perhaps you'll come out second best.

Dear, gentle reader, pardon, pray,
I'm thinking now I hear you say,
"Oh, nonsense! what a foolish fuss
About a horse, Bucephalus." _

This is no better verse, and possibly no worse, than much of the adolescent doggerel that is so often preserved by fond parents to prove that their child early gave signs of poetic and literary genius.

[Illustration: STATE UNIVERSITY BUILDINGS AT COLUMBIA, MO.]

CHAPTER VI

CHOICE OF A PROFESSION

Eugene Field was in his twenty-first year when he turned his back upon the colleges and faced life. Roswell M. Field, Sr., had been dead two years, and the moderate fortune which he had left, consisting mostly of realty valued at about \$60,000, had not yet been distributed among the legatees, Eugene and Roswell M. Field and Mary French Field. To the last named one-fifth had been willed in recognition of the loving care she had bestowed upon the testator's two motherless sons, each of whom was to receive two-fifths of the father's estate. Eugene therefore looked forward to the possession of property worth something like \$25,000. In St. Louis, in 1871, this was regarded as quite a large fortune. It would have been ample to start any young man, with prudence, regular habits, and a small modicum of business sense, well along in any profession or occupation he might adopt. But it was and would have been a

bagatelle to Eugene though ten times the amount, unless surrounded with conditions as impenetrable as chilled steel to a pewter chisel to resist the seductive ingenuity of his spendthrift nature.

On first going to St. Louis to live, Eugene Field was peculiarly fortunate in being taken into the home and enduring friendship of Melvin L. Gray, the executor of his father's estate, and of Mrs. Gray. To the memory of the latter, on her death several years since, Eugene contributed a memorial from which I have already quoted and which in some respects is the most sincerely beautiful piece of prose he ever wrote. In that he refers to his first coming to St. Louis in the following terms:

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My acquaintance with Mrs. Gray began in 1871. I was at that time just coming of age, and there were many reasons why I was attracted to the home over which this admirable lady presided. In the first-place Mrs. Gray's household was a counterpart of the households to which my boyhood life in New England had attracted me. Again both Mr. and Mrs. Gray were old friends of my parents; and upon Mr. Gray's accepting the executorship of my father's estate, Mrs. Gray felt, I am pleased to believe, somewhat more than a friendly interest in the two boys, who, coming from rural New England life into the great, strange, fascinating city, stood in need of disinterested friendship and prudent counsel. I speak for my brother and myself when I say that for the period of twenty years we found in Mrs. Gray a friend as indulgent, as forbearing, as sympathetic, as kindly suggestive and as disinterested as a mother, and in her home a refuge from temptation, care and vexation.

[Illustration: EARLY PORTRAITS OF EUGENE FIELD.]

In the subscription edition of "A Little Book of Western Verse," of which I had all the labor and none of the fleeting fame of publisher, Field dedicated his paraphrase of the Twenty-third Psalm to Mr. Gray, and it was to this constant friend of his youth and manhood, who still survives (1901), that Field indited the beautiful dedication of "The Sabine Farm":

*Come dear old friend! and with us twain
To calm Digentian groves repair;
The turtle coos his sweet refrain
And posies are a-blooming there,
And there the romping Sabine girls
With myrtle braid their lustrous curls.*

I have followed the original copy Field sent to Mr. Gray, which has several variations in punctuation from the version as printed in "The Sabine Farm," where the eighth line reads:

Bind myrtle in their lustrous curls,

which the reader can compare with the original as printed above. In that same dedication Field referred to Mr. Gray as one

Who lov'st us for our father's sake.

In announcing to Mr. Gray by letter, June 28th, 1891, his intention to make this dedication, Field wrote:

It will interest, and we [Roswell was a joint contributor to "The Sabine Farm"] are hoping that it will please you to know that we shall dedicate this volume to you, as a slight,

though none the less sincere, token of our regard and affection to you, as the friend of our father and as the friend to us. Were our father living, it would please him, we think, to see his sons collaborating as versifiers of the pagan lyrist whose songs he admired; it would please him, too, we are equally certain, to see us dedicating a result of our enthusiastic toil to so good a man and to so good a friend as you.

These quotations are interesting as indicating the character of the surroundings of Eugene Field's early life in St. Louis.

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It was the hope of their father that one, if not both, of his sons would adopt the profession of the law, in which he and his brother Charles and their father before them had attained both distinction and something more than a competence. But neither Eugene nor his brother Roswell had the slightest predilection for the law. By nature and by a certain inconsequence of fancy they were peculiarly unfitted for the practice of a profession which requires drudgery to attain a mastery of its subtle requirements and a preternatural gravity in the application of its stilted jargon to the simplest forms of justice.

The stage, on the other hand, possessed a fascination for Eugene. He was a mimic by inheritance, a comedian by instinct and unrestrained habit. Everything appealed to his sense of the queer, the fanciful, and the utterly ridiculous. He was a student of the whimsicalities of character and nature, and delighted in their portrayal by voice or pen. Strange to relate, however, his first thought of adopting the histrionic profession contemplated tragedy as his forte. He had inherited a wondrous voice, deep, sweet, and resonant, from his father, and had a face so plastic that it could be moulded at will to all the expressions of terror, malignity, and devotion, or anon into the most grotesque and mirth-provoking lines of comedy. His early love for reciting passages from "Spartacus," referred to by the Rev. Mr. Tufts, showed the bent of his mind, and when he became master of his own affairs he sought out Edwin Forrest and confided to him his ambition to go on the boards. Would that I could reproduce Field's version of that interview! He approached the great tragedian with a sinking heart, for Forrest had a reputation for brusque roughness never exceeded on or off the stage. But Eugene managed to prefer his request for advice and an opening in Forrest's company. The dark-browed Othello looked his visitor over from head to foot, and, in a voice that rolled through the flies of the stage where this little scene was enacted, exclaimed:

"Boy, return to your friends and bid them apprentice you to a wood-sawyer, rather than waste your life on a precarious profession whose successes are few and whose rewards are bankruptcy and ingratitude. Go! study and learn of Coriolanus."

This I repeat from memory, preserving the sense and the three words "boy," "wood-sawyer," and "Coriolanus," which always recurred in Field's various versions of "Why I did not go on the stage." Eugene returned to St. Louis and quietly disposed of the costumes he had prepared for such characters as Hamlet, Lear, and Spartacus.

[Illustration: MELVIN L. GRAY.]

Francis Wilson, in his "The Eugene Field I Knew," preserves the following story of Eugene's further venture in search of a profession:

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He organized a company of his own in conjunction with his friend, Marvin Eddy, who tells of a comedy Field wrote in which the heroines were impersonated by Field himself to the heroes of the only other acting member of the cast—Mr. Eddy. A Madame Saunders was the orchestra, or rather the pianist, and Monsieur Saunders painted the posters which announced the coming of the “great and only” entertainment. Rehearsals were held in the hotel dining-rooms. While a darky carried a placard of announcement, the result of Saunders’s artistic handiwork, the local band, specially engaged, played in front of the principal places in town. Mr. Eddy recalls that Field had a sweet bass voice which he used with much effect both in songs and recitations.

The season, confined to such towns in Missouri as Carrollton, Richmond, *etc.*, lasted about two weeks and was what the papers would call a *succes d’estime*.

Which, being interpreted into the vernacular of the author of “Sharps and Flats,” spelled a popular “frost” and a financial failure. And thus Missouri closed the door of comedy against Field, as Forrest had shut the gates of tragedy in his pale and intellectual face.

There was still one profession open to him in which he had made a few halting and tentative steps—that of journalism, with its broad entrance and narrowing perspective into the fair field of letters. While a sophomore at Knox he had exercised his irrepressible inclination “to shoot folly as it flies” by contributions to the local paper of Galesburg, which had the piquant flavor of personal comment. His youthful dash at the door of the stage had brought him into the comradeship of Stanley Waterloo and several other young journalists in St. Louis, and he was easily persuaded to try his ‘prentice hand as a reporter, under the tutelage of Stanley Huntley, of the “Spoopendyke Papers” fame.

But Eugene Field was yet without the stern incentive of necessity that is the seed of journalism. Circumstances, however, were ripening that would soon leave him no excuse on that score for not buckling down to “sawing wood,” as for twenty-three years he was wont to consider his daily work. When he reached his majority he was entitled to his share in the first distribution of his father’s estate. Before this could be made, Mr. Gray had to dispose of a part of the land which he held as executor of Roswell M. Field. It was accordingly offered for sale at auction, and enough to realize \$20,000 was sold. Under the will, Eugene’s share of this was \$8,000, and he immediately placed himself in the way of investing it where it would be the least incumbrance to him. While at Columbia he had met Edgar V. Comstock, the brother of his future wife, through whom it was that he made her acquaintance. Upon the first touch of the cash payment on his share of the executor’s sale, Eugene at once proposed to young Comstock that they visit Europe in company, he bearing the expenses of the expedition. His friend did not need much persuasion to embark on what promised to be such a lark. And so, in the fall of 1872, the two, against the prudent counsels of Mr. Gray, set out to see the world, and they saw it just as far as Eugene’s cash and the balance of that \$8,000 would go.

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In his "Auto-Analysis," Field says: "In 1872 I visited Europe, spending six months and my patrimony in France, Italy, Ireland, and England." This is as near the sober truth as anything Field ever wrote about himself. The youthful spendthrift and his companion landed in Ireland, and by slow, but extravagant, stages reached Italy, taking the principal cities and sights of England and France en route. About the only letters that reached America from Field during this European trip (always excepting those that went by every mail-steamer to a young lady in St. Jo) were those addressed with business-like brevity to Mr. Gray, calling for more and still more funds to carry the travellers onward. Before they had reached Italy the mails were too slow to convey Field's importunity, and he had recourse to the cable to impress Mr. Gray with the dire immediateness of his impecuniosity. In order to relieve this Mr. Gray was forced to discount the notes for the deferred payments on the sale of the Field land, and when Eugene and his brother-in-law-to-be reached Naples their soulful appeals for more currency with which to continue their golden girdle of the earth were met with the chilling notice "No funds available." Happily, in their meteoric transit across Europe, they had invested in many articles of vertu and convertible souvenirs of the places they had visited. By the sale, or sometimes by the pledge, of these accumulated impedimenta of travel, Eugene made good his retreat to America, where he landed with empty pockets and an inexhaustible fund of mirthful stories and invaluable experience.

On arriving in New York, Field had to seek the Western Union Telegraph office to secure funds for the necessary transportation to St. Louis. These Mr. Gray furnished so liberally that Eugene promptly invested the surplus in a French poodle, which he carried in triumph back to Missouri as a memento of his sojourn in Paris. This costly pet, the sole exhibit of his foreign travel, he named McSweeny, in memory, I suppose, of the pleasant days he had spent in Ireland.

[Illustration: MRS. MELVIN L. GRAY.]

Years afterward I remember to have been with Field when he opened a package containing a watch, which for more than a decade had been an unredeemed witness to his triumphant entry into and impecunious exit from Naples or Florence—I forget which.

Mrs. Below, Field's sister-in-law, in her little brochure, "Eugene Field in His Home," preserves a letter written by him from Rome to a friend in Ireland, in which may be traced the bent of his mind to take a whimsical view of all things coming within the range of his observation. In this he bids farewell to political discussion:

For since the collapse of the Greeley and Brown movement I have given over all hope of rescuing my torn and bleeding country from Grant and his minions, and have resolved to have nothing more to do with politics. Methinks, my country will groan to hear this declaration!

And there is the following description of how he was enjoying himself in Italy, with the last remittances of his patrimony growing fewer and painfully less:

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We have been two months in Nice and a month or so travelling in Italy. Two weeks we passed in Naples, and a most delightful place we found it. Its natural situation is simply charming, though the climate is said to be very unhealthy. I climbed Vesuvius and peered cautiously into the crater. It was a glorious sight—nothing else like it in the world! Such a glorious smell of brimstone! Such enlivening whiffs of hot steam and sulphuric fumes! Then too the grand veil of impenetrable white smoke that hung over the yawning abyss! No wonder people rave about this crater and no wonder poor Pliny lost his life coming too near the fascinating monster. The ascent of Vesuvius is no mean undertaking, and I advise all American parents to train their children especially for it by drilling them daily upon their backyard ash-heaps.

His descent of Vesuvius was made “upon a dead run,” and he “astonished the natives by my [his] celerity and recklessness.”

This letter was written on Washington’s birthday, 1873, and in later years the omission of any reference to the anniversary would have thrown suspicion on its genuineness; but Field had not yet begun to reckon life by anniversaries. Neither is there in it a shadow of the impending crisis in his finances nor a suggestion of another reason that robbed his return voyage of all distressing thoughts of retreat.

CHAPTER VII

MARRIAGE AND EARLY DOMESTIC LIFE

And now I come to that event in the life of Eugene Field which has naturally attracted the widest interest among all who have delighted in his written tributes to womankind and mother love. In his memorial to Mrs. Gray, Field has given expression to his special reverence for the love between parent and child. “For my dear mother,” he wrote, “went from me so many years ago that when I come to speak of the blessedness of a mother’s love, I hardly know whereof I speak, it is all so far, so very far away, and withal so precious, so sacred a thing.” This note recurs constantly through his writings, and it is not to be wondered at that the love of a man for a woman should have come early to a youth whose heart had always felt the yearning for something more tender and personal than the utmost kindness of those upon whose affections others had equal or greater claims.

Through his boyhood and school days, Field’s affection for the petticoated sex had been tempered by an irresistible impulse to tease all the daughters of Eve. It is doubtful if his affections were ever more seriously engaged by the girls of Amherst or the young ladies of Williams and Knox than was his attention by the regular studies of school or college. He came to both in his own way and time; with the difference that when he once felt the touch of the inevitable maiden’s hand in his, he responded with an immediate ardor far

different from the slow and eccentric manner in which he wooed the love of scholarship and letters.

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It was while a junior at the University of Missouri that Eugene Field made the acquaintance of Edgar V. Comstock, the sharer of the European trip and experiences. Now Edgar's parents lived at St. Joseph, and with them five sisters, the Misses Ida, Carrie, Georgia, Julia Sutherland, and Gussie Comstock, and the fairest of them all was Julia, albeit, at the time her brother was in college, she was still in short dresses. What more natural than that Edgar's elder sisters should visit him during his college term and there meet and be attracted by the gaunt, yet already unique and striking, figure of Eugene Field, the most unscholarly student and most incorrigible wag in Columbia? Julia was too young at this time, in the estimation of her sisters, to travel so far from St. Jo. Besides, what interest would a little girl in short skirts take in the grave and intellectual life of the brother and his undergraduate friends?

Out of the friendship of Eugene and Edgar and the visit of Edgar's sisters to Columbia, fate was weaving a web for the unsuspecting subject of this narrative which was not to be denied or altered by leaving little Julia to rusticate at home like another pretty little Cinderella. But this is not a fairy tale. It has no prince or glass slippers or pumpkin coaches, with which Field's fancy could have invested it. When the two friends separated on Commencement Day, after Field had delivered an oration that impressed Miss Ida (Mrs. Below), because of "his pale face and deep voice," a promise had been extorted that he would visit the Comstocks in their home in St. Joseph.

In the usual course of human events nothing further of concern to us would have come from the exchange of these common civilities of student life. Edgar would have returned to his home and forgotten Eugene, and Eugene would have gone his way and never known that Edgar had a younger sister Julia sitting at the gate awaiting the coming of her prince. But shortly after returning to St. Louis, Field was inspired by his natural roving restlessness—the French call it Fate—to run clear across the state of Missouri, some three hundred miles, to see what kind of a town St. Joseph was and incidentally to visit his college friend. Nearly twenty years later, in the gathering gloom of a rented apartment in London, the still-constant lover wrote of what happened when he first saw "Saint Jo, Buchanan County," in the early seventies. There he first met "the brown-eyed maiden" of his song, the Julia of numberless valentines that ran the gamut of grave and gay through the intervening years, the heroine of frequent drives which they "snailed along," as their proper horse went slow,

*In those leafy aisles, where Cupid smiles
In Lover's Lane, Saint Jo.*

* * * * *

*Ah! sweet the hours of springtime
When the heart inclines to woo,
And it's deemed all right for the callow wight
To do what he wants to do.*

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In his "Auto-Analysis" Field says, "I favor early marriage." Even if Edgar Comstock's elder sisters had known this, it is doubtful whether the thought would have crossed their minds that their brother's chum of twenty-one would overlook their more mature charms (they were all fair to look upon), to be more than gracious to their fourteen-year-old sister. Time out of mind sophisticated sisters of sixteen and eighteen have regarded younger sisters as altogether out of the sphere of those attentions which find their echo in wedding bells, only to awake some bright morning to find the child a woman and the attentive friend an accepted lover.

So it happened in this case. While her sisters were thinking how good it was of Field to take so much interest in a mere child, their long afternoon drives together down "Lovers' Lane, Saint Jo," had come to that happy turn that ignores all immaturities of age and lays the life of a man at the feet of the maid—albeit, the feet are still strangers to the French heels and have not yet known the witchery that goes with long dresses. Once sure of himself, Field lost no time in making his wishes known not only to Mistress Julia, but to her astonished family. She listened and was lost and won. Her parents expostulated that she was but a child. Field had no difficulty in convincing them that she would outgrow that. He pleaded for an immediate marriage, but her father firmly insisted that though Julia might not be too young to love and be loved, she was "o'er young to marry yet." Field was forced to accept the sensible decree against the early realization of his hopes and returned to St. Louis with the understanding that he should establish himself in business and wait until Miss Comstock was eighteen.

Whether this had anything to do with Field's going to Europe or not I cannot say. It had nothing to do with his return, for his term of waiting for his modern Rachel had still two years to run when he got back from Europe. There is a pretty story told that after all arrangements were made for his European trip and he and Edgar Comstock, accompanied by Miss Ida, had reached New York, she and her brother were amazed to receive a note by mail saying, "Important business has called me back to St. Joseph; I hope you will pardon my sudden leave-taking." They knew the nature of his important business and had to wait with what patience they could command while he posted fifteen hundred miles and returned with barely time, if all connections served, to catch the steamer.

Field never dreamed of fulfilling that condition of his probation which required him to become established in business. If he had done so the date of his marriage would have been indefinitely postponed. He returned from Europe, as we have seen, sans the better part of his patrimony, in the spring of 1873, and instead of attempting to establish himself in business, immediately set himself to secure an abridgment

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of his term of waiting. The years between fourteen and eighteen run slow. To every true lover Time moves with leaden feet. As Rosalind tells us, "Marry, he trots hard with a young maid between the contract of her marriage and the day it is solemnized: if the interim be but a se'nnight, Time's pace is so hard that it seems the length of seven year." What wonder then if the four years they were pledged to wait seemed an eternity, and that both set themselves to abridge it by all the arts and persuasion of young lovers. They pleaded and contrived so cunningly and successfully that the obdurate parents finally acceded to their wishes, and Eugene Field and Julia Sutherland Comstock were married at St. Joseph on October 16th, 1873. The bride "at that time was a girl of sixteen," is the laconic and only comment of the "Auto-Analysis." This he supplemented with the further information, "we have had eight children—three daughters and five sons."

[Illustration: MRS. EUGENE FIELD.]

But this is jumping from Saint Jo into the future more than a score of years in advance of our story. The young couple spent their honeymoon in the East. Field took especial delight in showing his bride of sixteen the wonders of New York and in playing practical jokes upon her unsophisticated nature, thereby keeping her in a perpetual state of amazement or of terror as to what he would do next. He sought to make her at home at Delmonico's by ordering "boiled pig's feet a la Saint Jo," with a gravity of countenance that tested the solemnity of the waiters and provoked the protest, "Oh, Eugene!" that was to be the feminine accompaniment to his boyish humor throughout their married life. No matter how often Field played his antics before or on his wife, they always seemed to take her by surprise and evoked a remonstrance in which pride over his mirthfulness mollified all displeasure.

By the time Field returned to St. Louis his ready funds were exhausted and he had to appeal to Mr. Gray to raise more by mortgaging the balance of his interest in his father's property. This is as good a place as any to take leave of the patrimony that came to Field at the death of his father, for he was never to see any more dividends from that source. When the loans fell due there were no funds to pay them, nor equity in the land to justify their renewal. So the land was sold and bid in by Mr. Gray, who holds it yet and would gladly dispose of it for what he paid out of his pocket and the goodness of his heart.

Roswell Field tells an interesting story of how their father's land speculation went out of sight in the queer mutations that befall real estate. In the year before Roswell the elder died, he took his younger son for a drive in the country south of St. Louis, where the property lies unimproved to this day. "Rosy," said the father, "hold on to your Carondelet property. In fifteen years it will be worth half a million dollars, and, very

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likely, a million and a half.” That was thirty-three years ago when the Carondelet iron furnaces were in full blast and the city seemed stretching southward. In 1869 the property was appraised at \$125,000. The panic came on and St. Louis changed its mind and headed toward the west, where the best part of the city now rears its mansions and wonders how it ever dreamed of going south. There Carondelet still bakes in the sun, on the far side of a slough which has diverted a fortune from the sons of the sanguine Roswell M. Field, the elder.

More provident than his brother, Roswell lived comfortably on his share for nearly seven years, only in the end to envy the superior shrewdness of Eugene, who, putting his portion into cash, realized more from it, and spent it like a lord while it lasted. I must confess that I share Roswell’s views, for the investment which Eugene Field made in the two years after coming of age in spending \$20,000 on experience, returned to him many fold in the profession he was finally driven to adopt, not as a pastime, but to earn a livelihood for himself and his growing family.

Having shot his bolt, Field went to work as a reporter on the St. Louis Evening Journal. He was not much of a success as a reporter for the simple reason that his fancy was more active than his legs and he was irresistibly disposed to save the latter at the expense of the former.

The best pen picture I have been able to secure of Field at this period of his career is from his life-long friend, William C. Buskett, the hero of “Penn Yan Bill,” to whom Field dedicated “Casey’s Table d’Hote,” the first poem in “A Little Book of Western Verse.”

“My association with Eugene Field,” says Mr. Buskett, “began in St. Louis, Mo., in 1872. We had a little circle of friends that was surely to be envied in that we were fond of each other and our enjoyment was pure and genuine. In 1875 we formed what was known as the ‘Arion Quartette,’ composed of Thomas L. Crawford, now clerk in the United States Circuit Court in St. Louis, Thomas C. Baker (deceased), Roswell Martin Field, a brother of Eugene, and myself. ‘Gene (as he was always called by his intimates) did not sing in the quartette, though he had a good voice. We frequently gave entertainments, at which Eugene was always the centre of attraction. The ‘Old Sexton’ was his favorite song. He was a great mimic and tease, and was always bubbling over with fun. At that time he was living on Adams Street, and many of these entertainments were given at his house. His household then consisted of himself, wife, and baby ‘Trotty,’ the pet name given his eldest daughter, Mary French Field, and with them Mrs. Comstock, mother of Mrs. Field, Edgar V. and Misses Carrie, Georgia, and Gussie Comstock, a delightful family.

“There was a genuine bond of friendship among us all then, for we were comparatively oblivious to care and trouble. We were all poor, you may say, earning reasonable

salaries, but that never seemed to worry us much. If one had a dollar we would always divide and the crowd was never a cent ahead, but we defied misfortune.

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"Among the pranks that Eugene used to play upon his wife in those days was that of appearing at some of our rehearsals on a warm evening in a costume that never failed to tease her. He would walk into the parlor and say: 'Well, boys, let us take off our coats and take it easy; it's too hot.' We would all proceed to do so. When Eugene would remove his coat he would display a red flannel undershirt, having pinned his cuffs to his coat sleeves and his necktie and collar to his shirt. He placed no limit on his humor."

Who of those at all intimate with Field will forget the enjoyment he took in trolling forth, in a quaint, quavering, cracked, but tuneful recitative, one stanza of "Ossian's Serenade":

I'll chase the antelope over the plain The tiger's cub I'll bind with a chain, The wild gazelle with its silvery feet I'll give to thee as a playmate sweet. Then come with me in my light canoe, While the sea is calm and the sky is blue, For I'll not linger another day For storms may rise and love decay.

Well, this was a snatch that lingered in his memory from the old days in Adams Street, St. Louis, where he first caught it from the lips of Mr. Buskett, in whose family it was an heirloom. Field finally traced it to its source through persistent letters written to himself in his "Sharps and Flats" column in the Chicago Record.

The glad wild days of which Mr. Buskett testifies were passed in St. Louis after Field's return from a brief experience as city editor of the St. Joseph Gazette in 1875-76. The time is fixed by the presence of "Trotty" in the gypsy circle, who was the best bit of news he "managed to acquire" in the days whereof he wrote:

*Oh, many a peck of apples and of peaches did I get
When I helped 'em run the local on the "St. Jo Gazette."*

Judge Henry W. Burke, of St. Joseph, is authority for this story of the time when he was associated with Field on the Gazette: Burke had been sent out to report a "swell society event" in the eastern part of the city. Nearly all the prominent people of St. Joseph were present and the names of all were published. Burke's story of the affair was a column long, and after it was written Field got hold of the copy and at the end of the list of those present added, "and last but not least the handsome and talented society editor of the Gazette, H.W. Burke." The feelings of the young reporter and embryo judge may be imagined.

But a few months of "whooping up locals on the St. Jo Gazette" were enough for Eugene, who pined for the broader field and more congenial associations of St. Louis. Thither he returned in the spring of 1876, and the Evening Journal, being by this time consolidated with the Times, he became an editorial writer and paragrapher on the hyphenated publication. He also resumed the eccentric semi-bohemian life which Mr.

Buskett has rather suggested than described. He had little or no business ability, had no use for money except to spend it, and therefore early adopted the plan of leaving to Mrs. Field the management of their household expenditures. To her, then, as throughout his life, was paid his weekly stipend—often depleted by the drafts for the “usual V” or the “necessary X” which he was wont to draw in advance from the cashier almost every week.

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Before the newspaper cashier had risen as a life-saving station on the horizon of Eugene Field's constant impecuniosity, his father's executor, Mr. Gray, had been the object of his intermittent appeals for funds to meet pressing needs. The means he invented to wheedle the generous, but methodical, executor out of these appropriations afforded Field more genuine pleasure than the success that attended them. The coin they yielded passed through his fingers like water through a sieve, but the enjoyment of his happy schemes abided in his memory and also in that of his constant friend always. One of Field's most effective methods of securing an advance from Mr. Gray was the threat of going on the stage under the assumed name of Melvin L. Gray. On one occasion Field approached him for money for living expenses, and being met with what appeared to be an unrelenting negative, coolly said: "Very well, if you cannot advance it to me out of the estate I shall be compelled to go on the stage. But as I cannot keep my own name I have decided to assume yours, and shall have lithographs struck off at once. They will read, 'To-night, M.L. Gray, Banjo and Specialty Artist.'" It is needless to say that the much-needed funds were found. But whether they went to the payment of living expenses, to the importunity of some threatening creditor, or were divided between the joys of the bibliomaniac and the bon vivant, Field in his most confiding humor never disclosed to me.

But this I know, that one of these always respectful, if apparently threatening, appeals to Mr. Gray, was the basis for one of the few newspaper attacks on Eugene Field that he resented deeply. Some time after he had left St. Louis and was engaged on the Denver Tribune, the Spectator, a weekly paper of the former city, contained the following gossip regarding him which was written in a thoughtless rather than an intentionally inimical spirit:

One of the cleverest young journalists of this city, a few years ago, was Mr. Eugene Field, whose charming short poems and witty paragraphs still occasionally find their way into our paper from Denver, where he is now located. Mr. Field was the happy possessor of one of those sunny dispositions which is thoroughly antagonistic to trouble of every description; he absolutely refused to entertain the black demon under any pretext whatever, and after spending a small fortune with the easy grace of a prince, he settled down to doing without one with equal grace and nonchalance, in a manner more creditable to himself than satisfying to his creditors. Did his hatter or tailor present an untimely bill, the gay debonnaire Eugene would scribble on the back thereof an impromptu rhyme expressive of his deep regret at not being able to offer the cash instead, and return the same with an airy grace that the renowned orator, J. Wilkins Micawber, himself might have envied.

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While the intellectual prominences upon the cranium of our friend and fellow-citizen had been well looked to, Dame Nature totally neglected to develop his bump of veneration; age possessed no qualities, wealth and position no prerogatives, which this singularly constituted young man felt bound to respect. When his father's executor, an able and exceedingly dignified member of the St. Louis bar, would refuse to respond to his frequent demands for moneyed advances, the young reprobate would coolly elevate his heels to a point in dangerous proximity to the old gentleman's nose, and threaten to go upon the stage, taking his guardian's honored name as a stage pseudonym and representing himself to be his son. This threat generally sufficed to bring the elder gentleman to terms, as he knew his charge's ability to execute as well as to threaten.

He was an inveterate joker, and his tendency to break out without regard to fitness of time or place into some mad prank made him almost a terror to his friends. On one occasion he informed a young lady friend that he did not think he would be able to come to her wedding because he had such a terrible toothache. "Then why not have your tooth pulled out?" said the young lady. "I never thought of that," quoth Eugene gravely; "I guess I will." When the wedding day arrived, among the other bridal gifts came a small box bearing Mr. Field's card, and reposing on a velvet cushion inside was the identical tooth which the bride had advised him to have extracted, and in the cavity where had once throbbed the agonizing nerve was neatly stuffed a fifty-dollar bill.

The recollection of the many amusing traits and freaks of this versatile genius affords amusement to the innumerable friends of his to this day. But time which sobers us all has doubtless taken some of the foam and sparkle from this rare spirit, although it would be hard to convince his friends that he will ever be anything but the gay and debonnaire Eugene.

Mr. Gray, who vouches for the general accuracy of the story of the strange wedding present, with its costly filling, preserves among his most cherished mementoes of his foster son-in-law, if I may be allowed the expression, Field's prompt repudiation of that paragraph in the above which charged him with lack of respect for one from whom he had received every evidence of affection:

DENVER, June 25, 1883.

DEAR MR. GRAY,

A copy of last Saturday's St. Louis Spectator has just arrived and I am equally surprised, pained and indignant to find in it a personal article about myself which represents me in the untruthful light of having been disrespectful and impudent to you. I believe you will bear me out when I say that my conduct towards you has upon all occasions been respectful and gentlemanly. I may not have been able to repay you the many obligations you have placed me under, but I have always regarded you with feelings of affectionate gratitude and I

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am deeply distressed lest the article referred to may create a widely different impression. Of course it makes no difference to you, but as gratitude is about all I have in this world to bestow on those who are good and kind to me, it is not right that I should be advertised—even in a joking way—as an ingrate.

Yours sincerely,

EUGENE FIELD.

This letter is valuable in more ways than the one which it was so unnecessarily written to serve. It is a negative admission of the general faithfulness of the impression left by Field upon those familiar with his life in St. Louis, and the reference to gratitude as all he had to bestow upon his true friends will be recognized as genuine by all who ever came near enough to his inner life to appreciate its sweetness as well as its lightness. As for his airy method of disposing of insistent creditors I have no doubt that the rhymes on the backs of their bills more often than not were more to them than the dollars and cents on their faces.

During the second period of his life in St. Louis two sons were born to Field and his wife, Melvin G., named after the “Dear Mr. Gray,” of the foregoing letter, and Eugene, Jr., who, being born when the Pinafore craze was at its height, received the nickname of “Pinny,” which has adhered to him to the present time. The fact that Melvin of all the children of Eugene Field was never called by any other name by a father prone to giving pet names, more or less fanciful, to every person and thing with which he came in contact, is, I take it, an even more sincere tribute to the high respect and love, if not reverence, in which he held Melvin’s godfather.

The third son and last child born to Field during the time of which I am now writing appeared upon the scene, with his two eyes of wondrous blue, very like his father’s, at Kansas City, whither the family had moved in the year 1880. Although he was duly christened Frederick, this newcomer was promptly nicknamed “Daisy,” because, forsooth, Field one day happened to fancy that his two eyes looked like daisies peeping up at him from the grass. The similitude was far fetched, but the name stuck.

In Kansas City, where Field went from St. Louis to assume at thirty years of age the managing editorship of the Times of that town, the family lived in a rented house which was made the rendezvous for all the light-hearted members of the newspaper and theatrical professions. Perhaps I cannot give a more faithful picture of Field’s life through all this period than is contained in the following unpublished lines, to the original manuscript of which I supplied the title, “The Good Knight and His Lady.” Perhaps I should explain that it was written at a time when Field was infatuated with the stories and style of the early English narratives of knights and ladies:

THE GOOD KNIGHT AND HIS LADY

Soothly there was no lady faire
In all the province could compare
 With Lady Julia Field,
The noble knight's most beauteous wife
For whom at any time his life
 He would righte gladly yield.

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'Twas at a tourney in St. Joe
The good knight met her first, I trow,
And was enamoured, straight;
And in less time than you could say
A pater noster he did pray
Her to become his mate.

And from the time she won his heart,
She sweetly played her wifely part—
Contented with her lot!
And tho' the little knightly horde
Came faster than they could afford
The good wife grumbled not.

But when arrived a prattling son,
She simply said, "God's will be done—
This babe shall give us joy!"
And when a little girl appeared,
The good wife quoth: "'Tis well—I feared
'Twould be another boy!"

She leased her castle by the year—
Her tables groaned with sumptuous cheer,
As epicures all say;
She paid her bills on Tuesdays, when
On Monday nights that best of men—
Her husband—drew his pay.

And often, when the good knight craved
A dime wherewith he might get shaved,
She doled him out the same;
For these and other generous deeds
The good and honest knight must needs
Have loved the kindly dame.

At all events, he never strayed
From those hymeneal vows he made
When their two loves combined;
A matron more discreet than she
Or husband more devote than he
It would be hard to find.

July 4th, 1885._

And so in very sooth it would have been. Under what circumstances and with what purpose Field wrote this I cannot now recall, if I ever knew. Nothing like it exists among my many manuscripts of his. It is written in pencil on what appears to be a sheet from a pad of ledger paper, watermarked “1879,” a fact I mention for the benefit of his bibliomaniac admirers. And, what is most peculiar, it is written on both sides of the sheet—something most unusual with Field, except in correspondence—where the economy of the old half ounce three-cent postage and his New England training prevailed over his disposition to be lavish with paper if not with ink. Anyway, Field’s “Good Knight and His Lady” gives a clearer insight into his home relations than any other thing that has been preserved respecting them. That it was prepared with care is witnessed by several interlineations in ink, sealed by a blot of his favorite red ink on the corner, which for a wonder does not bear the marks of the deliberate blemishes with which he frequently embellished his neatest manuscripts.

CHAPTER VIII

EARLY EXPERIENCES IN JOURNALISM

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Although Eugene Field made his first essay in journalism as a reporter, there is not the shadow of a tradition that he made any more progress along the line of news-gathering and descriptive writing than he did as a student at Williams. He had too many grotesque fancies dancing through his whimsical brain to make account or “copy” of the plain ordinary facts that for the most part make up the sum of the news of the average reporter’s day. What he wrote for the St. Louis Journal or Times-Journal, therefore, had little relation to the happening he was sent out to report, but from the outset it possessed the quality that attracted readers. The peculiarities and not the conventions of life appealed to him and he devoted himself to them with an assiduity that lasted while he lived. Thus when he was sent by the Journal to Jefferson City to report the proceedings of the Missouri State Legislature, what his paper got was not an edifying summary of that unending grist of mostly irrelevant and immaterial legislation through the General Assembly hopper, but a running fire of pungent comment on the Idiosyncrasies of its officers and members. He would attach himself to the legislators whose personal qualities afforded most profitable ammunition for sport in print. He shunned the sessions of Senate and House and held all night sessions of story and song with the choice spirits to be found on the floors and in the lobbies of every western legislature. I wonder why I wrote “western” when the species is as ubiquitous in Maine as in Colorado? From such sources Field gleaned the infinite fund of anecdote and of character-study which eventually made him the most sought-for boon companion that ever crossed the lobby of a legislature or of a state capital hotel in Missouri, Colorado, or Illinois. He was a looker-on in the legislative halls, and right merrily he lampooned everything he saw. Nothing was too trivial for his notice, nothing so serious as to escape his ridicule or satire.

There was little about his work at this time that gave promise of anything beyond the spicy facility of a quick-witted, light-hearted western paragrapher. Looking back it is possible, however, to discover something of the flavor of the inextinguishable drollery that persisted to his last printed work in such verses as these in the St. Louis Journal:

THE NEW BABY

We welcome thee, eventful morn
Since to the poet there is born
 A son and heir;
A fuzzy babe of rosy hue,
And staring eyes of misty blue
 Sans teeth, sans hair.

Let those who know not wedded joy
Reville this most illustrious boy—
 This genial child!
But let the brother poets raise



Their songs and chant their sweetest lays
To him reviled.

Then strike, O bards, your tuneful lyres,
'Awake, O rhyming souls, your fires,
And use no stint!
Bring forth the festive syrup cup—
Fill every loyal beaker up
With peppermint!



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March, 1878._

In the spring of 1879 the St. Louis Times-Journal printed the following April verses by Field, which were copied without the author's name by London Truth, and went the rounds of the papers in this country, credited to that misnamed paper, and attributed, much to Field's glee, to William S. Gilbert, then at the height of his Pinafore and Bab Ballad fame:

APRIL VESPERS

The turtles drum in the pulseless bay,
The crickets creak in the prickful hedge,
The bull-frogs boom in the puddling sedge
And the whoopoe whoops its vesper lay
 Away
In the twilight soft and gray.

Two lovers stroll in the glinting gloam—
His hand in her'n and her'n in his—
She blushes deep—he is talking biz—
They hug and hop as they listless roam—
 They roam—
It's late when they get back home.

Down by the little wicket-gate,
Down where the creepful ivy grows,
Down where the sweet nasturtium blows,
A box-toed parent lies in wait—
 In wait
For the maiden and her mate.

Let crickets creak and bull-frogs boom,
The whoopoe wail in the distant dell—
Their tuneful throbs will ne'er dispel
The planted pain and the rooted gloom—
 The gloom
Of the lover's dismal doom._

Just by the way of illustrating in fac-simile and preserving the character of the newspaper paragrapher's work in the last century, the following "Funny Fancies," by Field, from the St. Louis Journal of August 3d, 1878, may be of interest:

A green Christmas—No, no, we mean a green peach makes a fat graveyard.

A philanthropic citizen of Memphis has wedded a Miss Hoss. He doubtless took her for wheel or whoa.

We have tried every expedient and we find that the simple legend:
"Smallpox in this House" will preserve the most uninterrupted bliss in an editorial room.

There is a moment when a man's soul revolts against the dispensations of Providence, and that is when he finds that his wife has been using his flannel trousers to wrap up the ice in.

To the average Athenian the dearest spot on earth is the Greece spot.

Mr. Deer was hung at Atlanta. Of course he died game.

'Tis pleasant at the close of day
To play
Croquet.

And if your partner makes a miss
Why kiss
The siss.

But if she gives your chin a thwack,
Why whack
Her back!

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A great many newspaper men lie awake night after night mentally debating whether they will leave their property to some charitable institution or spend it the next day for something with a little lemon in it.

It was during his earlier connection with the St. Louis Journal that Field was assigned the duty of misreporting Carl Schurz, when that peripatetic statesman stumped Missouri in 1874 as a candidate for re-election to the United States Senate. Field in later years paid unstinted tribute to the logic, eloquence, and patriotic force of Mr. Schurz's futile appeals to the rural voters of Missouri. But during the trip his reports were in nowise conducive to the success of the Republican and Independent candidate. Mr. Schurz's only remonstrances were, "Field, why will you lie so outrageously?" It was only by the exercise of careful watchfulness that Mr. Schurz's party was saved from serious compromise through the practical jokes and snares which Field laid for the grave, but not revered Senator. On one occasion when a party of German serenaders appeared at the hotel where the party was stopping, before Mr. Schurz had completed a necessary change of toilet Field stepped out on the veranda, and, waving the vociferous cornet and trombone to silence, proceeded to address the crowd in broken English. As he went on the cheering soon subsided into amazed silence at the heterodox doctrines he uttered, until the bogus candidate was pushed unceremoniously aside by the real one. Mr. Schurz had great difficulty in saving Field from the just wrath of the crowd, which had resented his broken English more than his political heresies.

On another occasion when there was a momentary delay on the part of the gentleman who was to introduce Mr. Schurz, Field stepped to the front and with a strong German accent addressed the gathering as follows:

LADIES AND SHENTLEMEN: I haf such a pad colt dot et vas not bossible for me to make you a speedg to-night, but I haf die bleasure to introduce to you my prilliant chournatistic friend Euchene Fielt, who will spoke you in my blace.

It was all done so quickly and so seriously that the joke was complete before Mr. Schurz could push himself into the centre of the stage. Annoyance and mirth mingled in the explanations that followed. A love of music common to both was the only thing that made Field tolerable to his serious-minded elder.

Regarding Eugene Field's work upon the St. Jo Gazette, it was local in character and of the most ephemeral nature. There is preserved in the pocket-books of some old printers in the West the galley proof of a doggerel rhyme read by him at the printers' banquet, at St. Joseph, Mo., January 1st, 1876. It details the fate of a "Rat" printer, who, in addition to the mortal offence of "spacing out agate" type with brier, sealed his doom by stepping on the tail of our old friend, the French poodle McSweeny. The execution of the victim's sentence was described as follows:

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His body in the fatal cannon then they force Shouting erstwhile in accents madly hoarse, "Death to all Rats"—the fatal match is struck, The cannon pointed upwards—then kerchuck! Fiz! Snap! Ker—boom! Slug 14's grotesque form Sails out to ride a race upon the storm, Up through the roof, and up into the sky— As if he sought for "cases" up on high, Till like a rocket, or like one who's trusted, He fell again to earth— completely busted.

There is not much suggestion, or even promise, in this doggerel, of the Eugene Field whose verses of occasion were destined within a dozen years to be sought for in every newspaper office in America.

Long before Field learned the value of his time and writing, he began to appreciate the value of printer's ink and showed much shrewdness in courting its favor. He did not wait for chance to bring his wares into notice, but early joined the circle of busy paragraphers who formed a wider, if less distinguished, mutual admiration society than that free-masonry of authorship which at one time almost limited literary fame in the United States to Henry James, William Dean Howells, Charles Dudley Warner, and Thomas Bailey Aldrich. Robert J. Burdette is about the only survivor of the coterie of paragraphers, who, a quarter of a century ago, made such papers as the Burlington Hawkeye, the Detroit Free Press, the Oil City Derrick, the Danbury News, and the Cincinnati Saturday Night, widely quoted throughout the Union for their clever squibs and lively sallies. Field put himself in the way of the reciprocating round of mutual quotation and spicy comment, and before he left St. Louis his "Funny Fancies" in the Times-Journal had the approval of his fellow-jesters if they could not save that paper from its approaching doom.

Before leaving St. Louis, however, Eugene Field was to strike one of the notes that was to vibrate so sweetly and surely to his touch unto the end. He had lost one baby son in St. Jo, and Melvin was a mere large-eyed infant when his father was moved at Christmas-time, 1878, to write his "Christmas Treasures," which he frequently, though incorrectly, declared to be "the first verse I ever wrote." He probably meant by this that it was the first verse he ever wrote "that he cared to preserve," those specimens I have introduced being only given as marking the steps crude and faltering by which he attained a facility and technique in the art of versification seldom surpassed.

In Mr. Field's "Auto-Analysis" will be found the following reference to this early specimen of his verse:

I wrote and published my first bit of verse in 1879: It was entitled "Christmas Treasures" [see "Little Book of Western Verse"]. Just ten years later I began suddenly to write verse very frequently.

Which merely indicates what little track Field kept of how, when, or where he wrote the verse that attracted popular attention and by which he is best remembered. I need

hardly say that with a few noteworthy exceptions his most highly-prized poems were written before 1888, as a reference to the “Little Book of Western Verse,” above cited, and which was published in 1889, will clearly show.

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In the year 1880 Field received and accepted an offer of the managing editorship of the Kansas City Times, a position which he filled with singular ability and success, but which for a year put an almost absolute extinguisher on his growth as a writer. Under his management the Times became the most widely-quoted newspaper west of the Mississippi. He made it the vehicle for every sort of quaint and exaggerated story that the free and rollicking West could furnish or invent. He was not particular whether the Times printed the first, fullest, or most accurate news of the day so long as its pages were racy with the liveliest accounts and comments on the daily comedy, eccentricity, and pathos of life.

Right merrily did he abandon himself to the buoyant spirits of an irrepressible nature. Never sparing himself in the duties of his exacting position on the Times, neither did he spare himself in extracting from life all the honey of comedy there was in it. His salary did not begin to keep pace with his tastes and his pleasures. But he faced debts with the calm superiority of a genius to whom the world owed and was willing to pay a living.

There lived in Kansas City, when Field was at the height of his local fame there, one George Gaston, whose cafe and bar was the resort of all the choice spirits of the town. He fairly worshipped Field, who made his place famous by entertainments there, and by frequent squibs in the Times. Although George had a rule suspending credit when the checks given in advance of pay day amounted to more than a customer's weekly salary, he never thought of enforcing it in the case of 'Gene. More than once some particularly fine story or flattering notice of the good cheer at Gaston's sufficed to restore Field's credit on George's spindle. At Christmas-time that credit was under a cloud of checks for two bits (25 cents), four bits, and a dollar or more each to the total of \$135.50, when, touched by some simple piece that Field wrote in the Times, Gaston presented his bill for the amount endorsed "paid in full." When the document was handed to Field he scanned it for a moment and then walked over to the bar, behind which George was standing smiling complacently and eke benevolently.

"How's this, George?" said Field.

"Oh, that's all right," returned George.

"But this is receipted," continued the ex-debtor.

"Sure," said the gracious creditor.

"Do I understand," said Field, with a gravity that should have warned his friend, "that I have paid this bill?"

"That's what," was George's laconic assurance.

"In full?"

“In full’s what I said,” murmured the unsuspecting philanthropist, enjoying to the full his own magnanimity.

“Well, sir,” said Field, raising his voice without relaxing a muscle, “Is it not customary in Missouri when one gentleman pays another gentleman in full to set up the wine?”

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George could scarcely respire for a moment, but gradually recovered sufficiently to mumble, "Gents, this is one on yours truly. What'll you have?"

And with one voice Field's cronies, who were witnesses to the scene, ejaculated, "Make it a case." And they made a night of it, such as would have rejoiced the hearts of the joyous spirits of the "Noctes Ambrosianae."

From such revels and such fooling Field often went to work next day without an hour's sleep.

While in Kansas City Field wrote that pathetic tale of misplaced confidence that records the fate of "Johnny Jones and his sister Sue." It was entitled "The Little Peach" and has had a vogue fully as wide, if not as sentimental, as "Little Boy Blue." Field's own estimate of this production is somewhat bluntly set out in the following note upon a script copy of it made in 1887:

Originally printed in the Kansas City Times, recited publicly by Henry E. Dixey, John A. Mackey, Sol Smith Russell, and almost every comedian in America. Popular but rotten.

The last word is not only harsh but unjust. The variation of the closing exclamation of each verse is as skilful as anything Field ever did. Different, indeed, from the refrain in "Wynken, Blynken and Nod," but touching the chords of mirth with certainty and irresistible effect. Field might have added, that none of the comedians he has named ever gave to the experience of "Johnny Jones and His Sister Sue" in public recitation the same melancholy humor and pathetic conclusion as did the author of their misfortunes and untimely end himself. As a penance, perhaps, for the injustice done to "The Little Peach" in the quoted comment, Field spent several days in 1887 in translating it, so to speak, into Greek characters, in which it appears in the volume given to Mrs. Thompson, which is herewith reproduced in facsimile as a specimen of one of the grotesque fancies Field indulged:

[Illustration: "THE PEAR" IN FIELD'S "GREEK" TEXT.]

For the benefit of those unfamiliar with the Greek characters, I have retranslated this poem into corresponding English, which the reader can compare with his version of "The Little Peach."

THE PEAR

(In English Equivalent.)

A little pear in a garden grue
A little pear of emerald 'ue
Kissed bi the sun and bathed bi the due,
It grew.



One da, going that garden thro'
That little pear kame to the fue
Of Thomas Smith and 'is sister Sue
Those tou!

Up at the pear a klub tha throe
Down from the stem on uikh it grue
Fell the little pear of emerald 'ue
Peek-a-boo!

Tom took a bite and Sue took one too
And then the trouble began to brue
Trouble the doktors kouldn't subdue
Too true (paragorik too?).

Under the turf fare the daisies grue
They planted Tom and 'is sister Sue
And their little souls to the angels flue
Boo 'oo!

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But as to the pear of emerald 'ue
Kissed bi the sun and bathed bi the due
I'll add that its mission on earth is thro'
Adieu._

CHAPTER IX

IN DENVER, 1881-1883

It was in Denver that Eugene Field entered upon and completed the final stage of what may be called the hobble-de-hoy period in his life and literary career. He went to the capital of Colorado the most indefatigable merry-maker that ever turned night into day, a past-master in the art of mimicry, the most inveterate practical joker that ever violated the proprieties of friendship, time, and occasion to raise a laugh or puncture a fraud. As his friend of those days, E.D. Cowen, has written, "as a farceur and entertainer no professional could surpass him."

Field was tempted to go to Denver by the offer of the managing editorship of the Tribune, which was owned and controlled by the railroad and political coalition then dominant in Colorado. It was run on a scale of extravagance out of all proportion to its legitimate revenue, its newspaper functions being altogether subordinate to services as a railroad ally and political organ. The late O.H. Rothacker, one of the ablest and most versatile writers in the country, was at the head of its editorial staff, and Fred J.V. Skiff, now head of the Field Columbian Museum, was its business manager. These men, with Field, were given carte blanche to surround themselves with a staff and news-gathering equipment to make the Tribune "hum." And they did make it hum, so that the humming was heard far beyond the borders of the centennial state.

In studying the character of Eugene Field and his doings in Denver, it must be borne in mind that we are considering a period in the life of that city years ago, when the conditions were very different from those prevailing there now or from those to be met with to-day in any other large city in the country. Denver in 1881 was very much what San Francisco was under the influence of the gold rush of the early fifties, only complicated with the struggles of rival railway companies. All the politics, railway, and mining interests of the newly created state centred in Denver. The city was alive with the throbbing energy of strife and speculation over mines, railway grants, and political power. Life was rapid, boisterous, and rough. Nothing had settled into the conventional grooves of habit. The whole community was fearless in its gayety. It had not learned to affect the sobriety and demureness of stupidity lest its frivolity should be likened to the crackling of thorns under a pot.

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Into this civilization of the mining camp and smelter, just emerging into that of the railway, political, and financial centre of a vast and wealthy territory, came Eugene Field at the age of thirty-one, as free from care, warm-hearted, and open-handed as the most reckless adventurer in Colorado. Although a husband and a father, devoted as ever to his family, he threw himself into the bohemian life of Denver with the abandon of a youth of twenty. It is almost inconceivable where Field found the time and strength for the whirl of work and play in which there was no let up during his two years' stay in Denver. His duties as managing editor of the Tribune would have taxed the energies and resources of the strongest man, for he did not spare himself to fulfil the purpose of his engagement—to make the paper “hum.” He mapped out and directed the work of the staff with a comprehensive shrewdness and keen appreciation of what his public, as well as his employers, wanted that left no room for criticism. He kept the whole city guessing what sensation or reputation would be exploded next in the Tribune.

But he did not confine himself to the duties of directing the work of others. He started a column headed “Odds and Ends,” to which he was the principal and, by all odds, the most frequent contributor. He had not been in the city many months before he began the occasional publication of those skits which, under the title of “The Tribune Primer,” were gathered into his first unpretentious book of forty-eight pages, and which in its original form is now one of the most sought after quarries of the American bibliomaniac. Writing of these sketches in 1894, he said:

The little sketches appeared in the Denver Tribune in the Fall of 1881 and winter of 1882. The whole number did not exceed fifty. I quit writing them because all the other newspapers in the country began imitating the project.

In fact the series began October 10th, 1881, and ended December 19th of the same year. Edward B. Morgan, of Denver, in an introductory note to a few of the sketches omitted from the original “Tribune Primer,” printed in the Cornhill Booklet for January, 1901, gives the following version of how the skits began:

Of the origin of these sketches a story is told—although the writer cannot vouch for it—that on the Sunday evening preceding their first publication the “printer’s devil” was dispatched post-haste to Field’s home for copy which his happy-go-lucky manner of working had not produced. We may perhaps picture him engaged in what was always nearest and dearest to his heart, the amusement of his children, and perhaps reading to them or more likely composing for them primer sketches which he on the spur of the moment parodied for older readers. He has probably expressed his own feelings in the third one of the skits which he then wrote:

THE REPORTER ON SUNDAY

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Is this Sunday? Yes, it is a Sunday. How peaceful and quiet it is. But who is the man? He does not look peaceful. He is a reporter and he is swearing. What makes him swear? Because he has to work on Sunday? Oh no! he is swearing because he has to Break the Fourth Commandment. It is a sad thing to be a Reporter.

According to Mr. Cowen, however, the inspiration of the primer compositions was a libel suit brought against the Tribune by Governor Evans. In ridiculing the governor and his action Field three times used the old primer method—with illustrations after the fashion of John Phoenix—and the success of these little sarcasms undoubtedly encouraged him to elaborate the idea. Field also had a column of unsigned verse and storyettes in the Tribune under the heading, “For the Little Folks.”

Mr. Morgan discredits Field’s statement that the whole number of the Primers issued did not exceed fifty, because of the unlikelihood of printing such a small edition of a book to be sold for twenty-five cents and advertising it daily a month in advance, with a footnote, “Trade supplied at Special Rates.” Which merely shows that Mr. Morgan applied to Field’s acts the same rule of thumb that would be applicable to ninety-nine out of a hundred reasonable publishers. But Field was a rule unto himself, and he could be counted on to be the one hundredth and unique individual where the other ninety-and-nine were orthodox and conventional. The fact that only seven or eight copies of the original Primer are known to book collectors tends to confirm Field’s statement, which receives side light and support from his suggestion to Francis Wilson that the first edition of “Echoes from the Sabine Farm,” which Mr. Wilson issued in such sumptuous form nearly ten years later, should consist of only fifty copies, and that each of the two should reserve one and that they should “burn the other forty-eight.”

I have not the slightest doubt that the same disposition was made of all copies of “The Tribune Primer” over the first fifty, which were supplied to the favored few at “Special Rates.” This was just such a freak as would have occurred to Field, and in Denver there was no restraint upon the act following upon any wild thought that flitted through his topsy-turvy brain.

The jocose spirit in which Field at this time viewed the methods, duties, and responsibilities of journalism may be gleaned from the following specimens taken at random from his “Tribune Primer” sketches:

THE REPORTER

What is that I see? That, my Child, is the News Interviewer and he is now interviewing a Man. But where is the Man? I can see no Man. The Man, my Child, is in his Mind.

A RECHERCHE AFFAIR



This is a recherche Affair. Recherche Affairs are sometimes met with in Parlors and Ball Rooms. But more Generally in the Society Department of newspapers. A Recherche Affair is an Affair where the Society Editor is invited to the refreshment table. When the Society Editor is told his Room is Better than his Company, the Affair is not Recherche.

THE STEAM PRESS

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Is this not a Beautiful Steam Press? The Steam is Lying Down on the Floor taking a Nap. He came from Africa and is Seventy Years Old. The Press prints Papers. It can Print Nine Hundred papers an Hour. It takes One Hour and Forty Minutes to Print the Edition of the Paper. The Paper has a circulation of Thirty-seven thousand. The business Manager says so.

It was indeed a happy departure from the ruder fooling of the newspaper paragrapher of that day to clothe satire on current events and every-day affairs in the innocent simplicity of the nursery. But the vast majority of these Primer paragraphs were by no means as innocent as those quoted. Many of them had a sting more sharp than that of the wasp embalmed in one of them:

See the Wasp. He has pretty yellow stripes around his Body, and a darning needle in his tail. If you will Pat the Wasp upon the Tail, we will Give you a nice Picture Book.

Very many of them seemed inspired by an irrepressible desire to incite little children to deeds of mischief never dreamed of in Baxter's Saints' Rest. Here are a precious pair of paragraphs, each calculated to bring the joy that takes its meals standing into any home circle where youthful incorrigibles were in need of outside encouragement to their infant initiative:

THE NASTY TOBACCO

What is that Nasty looking object? It is a Chew of Tobacco. Oh, how naughty it is to use the Filthy weed. It makes the teeth black, and spoils the Parlor Carpet. Go Quick and Throw the Horrid Stuff Away. Put it in the Ice Cream Freezer or in the Coffee Pot where Nobody can see it. Little Girls you should never chew Tobacco.

THE MUCILAGE

The Bottle is full of Mucilage. Take it and Pour some Mucilage into Papa's Slippers. Then when Papa comes Home it will be a Question whether there will be more Stick in the Slippers than on your Pants.

But whoever wishes to learn of the peculiar side of Child life that appealed most strongly to Eugene Field when his own earlier born children were still in the nursery age, should get a copy of "The Tribune Primer" and read, not only the sketches themselves, but between the lines, where he will find much of the teasing spirit that kept his whole household wondering what he would do next. In these sketches will be found frequent references to the Bugaboo, a creation of his fancy, "With a big Voice like a Bear, and Claws as long as a Knife." His warning to the little children then was, "If you are Good, Beware of the Bugaboo." In later life he reserved the terror of the Bugaboo for naughty little boys and girls.

His first poem to his favorite hobgoblin, as it appeared in the Denver Tribune, was the following:

THE AWFUL BUGABOO

There was an awful Bugaboo
Whose Eyes were Red and Hair was Blue;
His Teeth were Long and Sharp and White
And he went prowling 'round at Night.

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A little Girl was Tucked in Bed,
A pretty Night Cap on her Head;
Her Mamma heard her Pleading Say,
“Oh, do not Take the Lamp away!”

But Mamma took away the lamp
And oh, the Room was Dark and Damp;
The Little Girl was Scared to Death—
She did not Dare to Draw her Breath.

And all at once the Bugaboo
Came Rattling down the Chimney Flue;
He Perched upon the little Bed
And scratched the Girl until she bled.

He drank the Blood and Scratched again—
The little Girl cried out in vain—
He picked her up and Off he Flew—
This Naughty, Naughty Bugaboo!

So, children when in Bed to-night,
Don't let them Take away the Light,
Or else the Awful Bugaboo
May come and Fly away with You._

It is a far cry in time and a farther one in literary worth from “The Awful Bugaboo” of 1883 to “Seein’ Things” of 1894. The sex of the victim is different, and the spirit of the incorrigible western tease gives way to the spirit of Puritanic superstition, but there can be no mistaking the persistence of the Bugaboo germ in the later verse:

*An’ yet I hate to go to bed, For when I’m tucked up warm an’ snug an’ when my prayers
are said, Mother tells me “Happy Dreams!” and takes away the light, An’ leaves me lyin’
all alone an’ seein’ things at night!*

* * * * *

*Sometimes they are as black as ink, an’ other times they’re white—
But the color ain’t no difference when you’re seein’ things at night.*

In all that Field wrote, whether in prose or rhyme, for the Denver Tribune nothing contributed to his literary reputation or gave promise of the place in American letters he was to attain, save one little bit of fugitive verse, which was for years to justify its title of “The Wanderer.” It contains one of the prettiest, tenderest, most vitally poetic ideas that ever occurred to Eugene Field. And yet he deliberately disclaimed it in the moment of



its conception and laid it, like a little foundling, at the door of Madame Modjeska. The expatriation of the Polish actress, between whom and Field there existed a singularly warm and enduring friendship, formed the basis for the allegory of the shell on the mountain, and doubtless suggested to him the humor, if not the sentiment, of attributing the poem to her and writing it in the first person. The circumstances of its publication justify its reproduction here, although I suppose it is one of the most familiar of Field's poems. I copy it from his manuscript:

THE WANDERER

Upon a mountain height, far from the sea,
 I found a shell,
And to my listening ear this lonely thing
Ever a song of ocean seem'd to sing—
 Ever a tale of ocean seem'd to tell.

How came the shell upon the mountain height?
 Ah, who can say
Whether there dropped by some too careless hand—
Whether there cast when oceans swept the land,
 Ere the Eternal had ordained the day?

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Strange, was it not? Far from its native deep,
One song it sang;
Sang of the awful mysteries of the tide,
Sang of the restless sea, profound and wide—
Ever with echoes of the ocean rang.

And as the shell upon the mountain height
Sang of the sea,
So do I ever, leagues and leagues away—
So do I ever, wandering where I may,
Sing, O my home! sing, O my home! of thee!_

I have seen it stated that Madame Modjeska regarded the liberty taken with her name in this connection with feelings of displeasure, and Hamlin Garland has reported a conversation with Field, during the summer of 1893, when the latter, speaking of his work in Denver, and of "The Tribune Primer" as the most conspicuous thing he did there, said: "The other thing which rose above the level of my ordinary work was a bit of verse, 'The Wanderer,' which I credited to Modjeska, and which has given her no little annoyance." In his note to Mrs. Thompson's manuscript copy of "The Wanderer," Field says:

These verses appeared in the Denver Tribune credited to Helena Modjeska. They were copied far and wide over Modjeska's name. Modjeska took the joke in pretty good part. The original publication was June, 1883.

Madame Modjeska not only took the joke in "pretty good part," but esteemed its perpetrator all the more highly for the light in which it placed her before the public, which she was then delighting with her exquisite impersonations of Rosalind and Mary Stuart. For years after its publication Madame Modjeska, wherever she appeared throughout the country, was reminded of this joke by the scores of letters sent to her room, as soon as she registered, requesting autograph copies of "The Wanderer," or the honor of her signature to a clipping of it neatly pasted in the autograph hunter's album. Nor were autograph hunters the only ones imposed on by the signature to "The Wanderer." In August, 1883, Professor David Swing, writing in the Weekly Magazine, gave it as his opinion that the alleged Modjeska poem was indeed written by Modjeska, and concluded: "The conversation and tone of her thoughts as expressed among friends betrays a mind that at least loves the poetic, and is quite liable to attempt a verse. The child-like simplicity of this little song is so like Modjeska that no demand arises for any outside help in the matter." And Field, like the true fisherman he was, having secured a fine rise, proceeded to remark: "It will, perhaps, pain the Professor to learn that Madame Modjeska now denies ever having seen the verses until they appeared in print."

But not until Field reclaimed his child and published “The Wanderer” as his own, in “A Little Book of Western Verse,” was the verse-reading public satisfied to give the Polish comedienne a long rest from importunities concerning it.

CHAPTER X

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ANECDOTES OF LIFE IN DENVER

No story of Eugene Field's life would be true, no study of his personality complete, if it ignored or even glossed over "the mad wild ways of his youthful days" in Denver. He never wearied of telling of the constant succession of harum-scarum pranks that made the Tribune office the storm-centre for all the fun-loving characters in Colorado. Not that Field ever neglected his work or his domestic duties for play, but it was a dull day for Denver when his pen or his restless spirit for mischief did not provide some fresh cause for local amazement or merriment. His associates and abettors in all manner of frolics, where he was master of the revels, were kindred spirits among the railway managers, agents, politicians, mining speculators, lawyers, and doctors of the town. Into this company a fresh ingredient would be introduced every week from the theatrical troupes which made Denver the western limit of their circuits or a convenient break in the long overland jump.

Field's office was a fitting retreat for the genius of disorder. It had none of the conveniences that are supposed to be necessary in the rooms of modern managing editors. It was open and accessible to the public without the intermediary of an office-boy or printer's devil. Field had his own way of making visitors welcome, whether they came in friendly guise or on hostile measures bent. Over his desk hung the inhospitable sign, "This is my busy day," which he is said to have invented, and on the neighboring wall the motto, "God bless our proof-reader, He can't call for him too soon." But his crudest device, "fatal," as his friend E.D. Cowen writes, "to the vengeance of every visitor who came with a threat of libel suit, and temporarily subversive of the good feeling of those friends he lured into its treacherous embrace, was a bottomless black-walnut chair." Its yawning seat was always concealed by a few exchanges carelessly thrown there—the floor being also liberally strewn with them. As it was the only chair in the room except the one Field occupied himself, his caller, though never asked to do so, would be sure to see in Field's suave smile an invitation to drop into the trap and thence ingloriously to the floor. Through this famous chair, on his first visit to the Tribune office, "Bill" Nye dropped into a lifelong friendship with Eugene Field. When the victim happened to be an angry sufferer from a too personal reference to his affairs in the paper, Field would make the most profuse apologies for the scant furnishings of the office, which he shrewdly ascribed to the poverty of the publishing company, and tender his own chair as some small compensation for the mishap.

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I have spoken of Edgar W.—more familiarly known as “Bill”—Nye’s unceremonious introduction to Field’s friendship. This followed upon what was virtually the discovery of Nye by Field. The former was what old-time printers described as “plugging along” without recognition on the Laramie Boomerang. His peculiar humor caught the attention of Field, who, with the intuition of a born journalist, wrote and got Nye to contribute a weekly letter to the Tribune. At first Nye was paid the princely stipend of \$5 a week for these letters. This was raised to \$10, and when Field informed Nye that he was to receive \$15 per letter, the latter promptly packed his grip and took the first train for Denver, to see what sort of a newspaper Croesus presided over the order-blank of the Tribune. When he appeared before Field he was whiskered like a western farmer and his head had not pushed its way through a thick growth of hair. He was altogether a different looking personage from the bald-headed, clean-shaven humorist with whose features the world was destined to become so well acquainted.

After the incident of the chair nothing would do Field but a dinner at the St. James Hotel, given in honor of Bill Nye. The affair started after the Tribune had gone to press and lasted all night. At five o’clock in the morning the company escorted their guest to his room and departed, with elaborate professions of good-will. They waited in the hotel office long enough for Nye to get to bed, and then sent up cards, requesting his presence down-stairs on immediate business. But Nye was equal to his tormentors, and the bell-boy returned, bearing a shot-gun, with the message that it would speak for him. When Nye first visited Field in Chicago, his presence in town was heralded with the following paragraph:

The latest news from Bill Nye is to the effect that he has discovered a coal mine on his little farm near Hudson, Wis. Ten days ago he was spading over his garden—an exercise recommended by his physician—and he struck a very rich vein of what is called rock coal. Nye paid \$2,000 for this farm, and since the development of this coal deposit on the premises he has been offered \$10,000 for five acres. He believes that he has a great fortune within his grasp.

As illustrative of how impossible it was for Field to keep money, it is related that on one occasion he coaxed F.J.V. Skiff, then business manager of the Tribune, to advance “just another” \$10 to meet some urgent domestic demands. Scarcely had Mr. Skiff time to place the order in the cash drawer, ere Field stood before him once more, pleading *in forma pauperis* for “another X.” He was asked what had become of the ten he had just received.

“Just my luck, Fred,” Field replied. “As I was leaving the office whom should I meet but one of my old printer boys, dead broke. The X was all I had, and he told me he had to have it, and he had to.” It is needless to say that Field got the second advance and succeeded in dodging all impecunious “old boys” on the way home.

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I have said that Denver at that time was the centre of all the railway interests of Colorado and the far West. Being also the capital, it was the place where legislators and railway agents wrestled with problems of regulating tariffs and granting privileges to what may be called their mutual benefit. It was from his experience in Denver that Field learned that two-thirds of the business of a western legislature consisted in causing legislative hold-ups, of which the transportation companies were the victims, and the most vociferously impeccable statesmen the chief beneficiaries. The secret service funds of the railway companies doing business in Colorado paid out a hundred dollars for protection from notorious sandbagging bills and resolutions to every dollar they spent for special favors in grants and franchises.

This by way of preface to a story in which Eugene Field and a railway official, who, as I write, holds a high position in the transportation world, figure. This official was at that time the superintendent of the Southwestern Division of the Pullman system, with headquarters at St. Louis. In those days every session of the Colorado legislature saw its anti-Pullman rate reduction bill, which Wickersham, as I shall call him, because that is not his name, was commissioned to checkmate, strangle, or make away with in committee by the aid of annual passes, champagne, and the mysterious potency of the national bank-note. As was remarked by E.D. Cowen, to whose notes I am indebted for refreshing my memory of Field's tales, Wickersham never failed in generalship, principally because he was bold in his methods and picturesquely lavish with his munitions of war. The Pullman Company did not then enjoy the royalty and defensive alliance which now protects it against rate legislation throughout the West, and so Wickersham was kept continually on the go, making alliances and friendships among legislators and journalists against the days of reckoning.

Field, as the managing editor of the Tribune, was a special favorite with Wickersham, as he was of every professional and commercial visitor having an axe to grind at the capital of the state. Pullman's representative had the wit to appreciate Field, both for his personal qualities and the assistance he could render through the columns of the newspaper. Field reciprocated the personal friendship, but, so far as the Tribune was concerned, took a grim satisfaction in giving Wickersham to understand that though he could use its freedom he could not abuse it or count upon its aid beyond what was strictly legitimate. Field's stereotyped introduction of Wickersham—one calculated to put him on a pleasant business footing with every practical politician, was "He's a good fellow and a thoroughbred." So his coming was invariably celebrated by a general round-up of all the good fellows in Denver, and his departure left the aching heads and parched recollections that from the days of Noah have distinguished the morning after.

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After one of Wickersham's calls, Field determined that the sobriety and severe morality of Denver were being scandalized by these periodical visitations, and he issued orders to the Tribune staff that when next the "good fellow and thoroughbred" appeared on the scene he should be given a wide berth, or, as Field put it, should be left to "play a lone hand in his game." So when Wickersham next swung around the legislative circle to Denver, not a man about the editorial rooms would go out with him, listen to his stories, accept a cigar at his hands, or associate with him in any of the ways that had been their cheerful wont. The coldness and loneliness of the situation excited Wickersham's thirst for revenge and also for what is known as the wine of Kentucky. Having succeeded in getting up a full head of steam, he started out for an explanation or a counter demonstration. Arriving at the Tribune office, when the desks were vacated at the evening dinner-hour, he interpreted it as a further affront and challenge, which he proceeded to answer by destroying every last scrap of copy in sight for the morrow's paper. He then converted himself into a small cyclone, and went through every desk, strewed their litter on the floor, broke all the pens and pencils, and, in the language of an eye-witness, "ended by toning the picture of editorial desolation with the violet contents of all the ink bottles he could find."

Then he retired in hilarious satisfaction from the scene of devastation he had made. Consternation reigned in that office until Field returned, when he quickly dispelled the gloom with a promise of revenge, and set the staff at work to patch up the ruin the envious Wickersham had made. But they were not permitted to do this in peace, for their enemy, returning in the dark of night, bombarded the windows of the editorial rooms with the staves of old ash-barrels he had found conveniently by.

While Wickersham was engaged in this second assault, with windows smashing to right of them and to left of them, with glass falling all around them, and the staves of old ash-barrels playing a devil's tattoo about them, the devoted band of editors, reporters, and copy-readers worked nobly on. They had confidence in their leader that their hour would come. Their first duty was to get out the paper. After that they looked for the deluge.

When Wickersham had expended his last stave and fiercest epithet on the shattered windows he retired in bad order to his apartments at the St. James Hotel.

Now began Field's revenge, planned with due deliberation and executed with malicious thoroughness. He first sent for "Possum Jim," an aged and very serious colored man, who worshipped "Mistah Fiel" because of the sympathy Eugene never withheld from the dark-skinned children of the race. "Possum Jim" spent most of his existence on the same street corner, waiting for a job, which invariably had to come to him. His outfit consisted of an express wagon strung together with telegraph wire, and a nondescript four-footed creature that once bore the similitude of a horse. Whenever Field had an odd job to be done about his household he would go out of his way to let "old 'Possum

Jim” earn the quarter—partly to do an act of kindness to “Jim,” but chiefly to tease Mrs. Field by the appearance of the broken-down equipage lingering in front of their dwelling.

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Just before the Tribune went to press, a sergeant of police called on Field in response to a summons by telephone. After a whispered conference he left, with a broad smile struggling under his curling mustache. In company with a number of his staff Field next made the round of the all-night haunts and gathered to his aid as fine a collection of bohemian “thoroughbreds” as ever made the revels of Mardi Gras look like a Sunday-school convention. He installed them at the resort of a Kentucky gentleman named Jones, opposite the St. James. As one who was there reports, “The amber milk of the Blue-grass cow flowed in plenty.” Bidding his associates await his return, Field, armed with a single bottle, crossed the street to the hotel in search of the enemy.

For half, an hour they waited, in growing fear that Wickersham had retired for the night, with orders the night clerk dared not disobey, that he was not to be disturbed, even if the hotel was on fire. Just as expectation had grown heavy-eyed, Field appeared crossing the street with Wickersham on his arm, very happy, more of a good fellow than ever and more than ever ready for red-eyed anarchy of any sort.

“After a swift hour”—I quote from one who was there and whose account tallies with Field’s own—“and as the morning opened out Field insisted on breaking for sunlight and fresh air. Wickersham was always a leader, even in the matter of making a noise. He sang; everyone else applauded. He shrieked and shouted; all approved. Windows went up across the way in the hotel, and night-capped heads protruded to investigate. The frantic din of the electric-bells could be heard. The clerk appeared to protest.” What attention might have been paid to his protest will never be known, for just then “Possum Jim’s” gothic steed and rattletrap cart rounded the corner.

“I say, old man,” shouted Field, “we want your rig for an hour; what’s it worth?”

Jim played his part slyly, and the bargain was finally struck for \$2.50, the owner to present no claim for possible damages. Wickersham was so delighted with the shrewdness of the deal that he insisted on paying the bill. The horse, which could scarcely stand on his four corners, was quickly unharnessed and hitched to a telegraph pole, and before he realized what the madcaps were about, Wickersham was himself harnessed into the shafts. The novelty of his position suited his mood. He pranced and snorted, and pawed the ground and whinnied, and played horse in fine fettle until the word go. Field, with a companion beside him, held the reins and cracked the whip. The others helped the thoroughbred in harness the best they could by pushing.

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In this manner, and all yelling like Comanche Indians, twice they made the circuit of the block. All the guests in front of the big hotel were leaning out of the windows, when the police sergeant popped in sight with a squad of four men. Field, who had been duly apprised of their approach, gave the signal, and the crowd, making good their retreat to Jones's, abandoned Wickersham to his fate. He was quickly, but roughly, disentangled from the intricacies of "Possum Jim's" rope-yarn harness. The more he protested and expostulated, the more inexorable became the five big custodians of the outraged peace, until the last word of remonstrance and explanation died upon his well-nigh breathless lips. Then he tried cajoling and "connudging" and those silent, persuasive arts so often efficacious in legislative lobbies; but there were too many witnesses to his crime, and bribes were not in order.

When at last Wickersham, from sheer despair and physical exhaustion, sank limp in the arms of his captors, the sergeant, on the pretext of seeking the aiders and abettors in the riot, half carried, half led the prisoner into Jones's resort.

A quarter of an hour later the police squad made its exit by the back door, and less than an hour afterward Wickersham's special was bearing him southward toward Texas.

But Field's revenge was not fully sated yet. He caused a \$2 Pullman rate-bill, making a sixty per cent. reduction, to be prepared in the Tribune office, and secured its introduction in the legislature by the chairman of the House committee on railways. The news was immediately flashed East, and Wickersham came posting back to Denver with the worst case of monopoly fright he had ever experienced. The day after his arrival the Tribune had something to say in every department of his nefarious mission, and every reference to him bristled with biting irony and downright accusation. Never was a "good fellow and a thoroughbred" so mercilessly scarified.

For the remaining six weeks of the session Wickersham did not leave Denver, nor did he dare look at the Tribune until after breakfast. Every member of the legislature received a Pullman annual. Champagne flowed, not by the bottle, but by the dray-load. Wickersham begged for quarter, but his appeals fell like music on ears that heard but heeded not. Nor did he find out that the whole affair was a put-up job until the bill was finally lost in the Senate committee.

One of the familiar stories of Field's rollicking life in Denver was at the expense of Oscar Wilde, then on his widely advertised visit to America. As the reader may remember, this was when the aesthetic craze and the burlesques inseparable from it were at their height. Anticipating Wilde's appearance in Denver by one day, and making shrewdly worded announcements through the Tribune in keeping with his project, Field secured the finest landau in town and was driven through the streets in a caricature verisimilitude of the poet of the sunflower and the flowing hair.

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The impersonation of Wilde a la Bunthorne in Gilbert and Sullivan's opera, "Patience," was well calculated to deceive all who were not in the secret. Field's talent as a farceur and a mimic enabled him to assume and carry out the expression of bored listlessness which was the popular idea of the leader of aesthetes. Nobody in the curious, whooping, yelling crowd assembled along the well-advertised route suspected the delusion, and after an hour's parade Field succeeded in making his exit from public gaze without betraying his identity.

When Wilde turned up the next day he was not a little mystified to learn that he had created a sensation driving around Denver in the raiments of Bunthorne, while in reality travelling over the prairie in a palace-car. It was Field himself who relieved his curiosity with a highly amusing narrative of the experience of the joker lounging in the seat of honor in the landau.

Wilde, it is related, saw nothing funny in the affair, nor was he provoked at it. His only comment was, "What a splendid advertisement for my lecture."

It was while in Denver that Field had numerous and flattering offers to leave journalism for the stage, and more than once he was sorely tempted to make the experiment. In the natural qualifications for the theatrical profession he was most richly endowed. In the arts of mimicry he had no superior. He had the adaptable face of a comedian, was a matchless raconteur, and a fine vocalist. At a banquet or in a parlor he was an entertainer of truly fascinating parts. During his life in St. Louis and Kansas City his inclination had led him to seek the society of the green-room, and in Denver his position enlarged the circle of his acquaintance with the theatrical profession, until it embraced almost every prominent actor and actress in America, and was subsequently extended to include the more celebrated artists of England. Among his favorites was Madame Bernhardt, whose several visits to the United States afforded him an opportunity for some of the most entertaining sketches that ever delighted his Chicago readers. None of these contained more pith in little than that brief paragraph with which he opened his column one day, to the effect that "An empty cab drove up to the stage-door of the Columbia Theatre last night, from which Madame Bernhardt alighted."

Among the celebrities who visited Denver while Field was in what he would have called his perihelion was Miss Kate Field, with whose name he took all the liberties of a brother, although there was no blood relationship between them thicker than the leaves of a genealogical compendium. He took especial pains to circulate the report through all the West that Miss Field had brought a sitz-bath with her to alleviate the dust and hardships of travel in the "Woolly West," where, as he represented, she thought running water was a luxury and stationary bath-tubs were unknown. But he atoned for this by one of the daintiest pleasantries that ever occurred to his playful mind. When Miss Field was preparing for her lecture tour in Mormon land she started an inquisitive correspondence with her namesake, whose Tribune Primer was then spreading his fame through the exchanges. The two soon discovered that they were cousins, no

matter how many times removed, but near enough to inspire Field to entrust a letter to Uncle Sam's mail addressed thus:

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A maiden fair of untold age Seeks to adorn our Western stage; How foolish of her, yet how nice To write me, asking my advice! New York's the city where you'll find This prodigy of female kind; Hotel Victoria's the place Where you'll see her smiling face. I pray thee, postman, bear away This missive to her, sans delay. These lines enclosed are writ by me— A Field am I, a Field is she. Two very fertile fields I ween, In constant bloom, yet never green, She is my cousin; happy fate That gave me such a Cousin Kate.

From Denver to New York this pretty conceit carried the epistle just as safely and directly as if it had borne the most prosaic superscription the postal authorities could exact, and I venture to say that it was handled with a smiling solicitude never bestowed on the humdrum epistles that travel neither faster nor surer for being marked “important and immediate.” This was before Field had formed the habit of illuminating everything he wrote with colored inks, or the missive to his Cousin Kate would have expressed his variegated fancies in all the colors of the rainbow, especially red.

In a short sketch, entitled “Eugene Field in Denver,” Wolfe Londoner speaks of his friend as a “bright ray of laughing sunshine across this shadowy vale, a mine of sentiment and charity, an avalanche of fun and happiness,” but one who “never in all the run of his merry, joyous career was known to wake up with a cent.” Why?

Here is the explanation given by Mr. Londoner, who was familiar with every phase of Eugene Field's life in Denver:

“The course of one short day was ever long enough to drain his open purse, and his boon companions were as welcome to its contents, while it could stand the strain, as its careless, happy owner. The bright side of life attracted his laughing fancy, and with stern and unalterable determination he studiously avoided all seriousness and shadow. There was no room in his happy composition for aught of sorrow or sadness, and a quick and merry wit always extricated him from every embarrassing position or perplexing dilemma.”

Mr. Londoner rightly says that an inert Eugene Field was an impossibility, and at that time he was only supremely happy when busily engaged in playing some practical joke on his ever-suspecting but never sufficiently wary friends. Of course Mr. Londoner himself was victimized, and more than once. During one campaign, as chairman of the Republican County Central Committee, Mr. Londoner was delegated to work up enthusiasm among the colored voters of Denver, and in an unguarded moment he took Field into his confidence and boasted of his flattering progress. The next morning the following advertisement, displayed with all the prominence of glaring scare-heads, appeared:

WANTED!!

EVERY COLORED MAN IN THE CITY.

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To call at Wolfe Londoner's Store. A Car load of Georgia Watermelons Just received For a special distribution Among his Colored Friends. *Call Early and get Your Melon!!!*

It is needless to say that when Mr. Londoner's store opened in the morning an ever-increasing cloud of dusky humanity, with teeth that glistened with the juice of anticipation, gathered about the entrance. Business in the store was at a standstill and travel on the street was blocked. No explanation could appease the rising anger of that dark multitude. It was melons, or a riot. Melons, or that unheard-of thing—a colored landslide to the democracy. Mr. Londoner was at his wits' ends. There were no melons in the market, and none expected. Just as Londoner was preparing to abandon his store to the wrath of the justly incensed melon-maniacs, a car-load of magnificent melons dropped into one of the freight sidings, and Londoner and the Republican party were saved. Nobody ever knew how or whence that pink-hearted manna came. The price was exorbitant, but that did not matter. Londoner paid it with the air of a man who had ordered melons and was indignant that the railway company had disappointed him in not delivering them the day before. There was not a crack in the solid black Republican column on election day.

But Field was not through with Mr. Londoner yet. The colored brethren had to hold their ratification meeting to endorse the Republican nominations, and more especially to render thanks for the creation of watermelons, and to the man who paid for them, out of season. Of course Mr. Londoner was invited to attend, and when it came his turn to address the meeting the chairman, a colored deacon of the church where "Possum Jim" worshipped, by the name of Williams, introduced him as follows:

"I now take great pleasure in introducing to you our friend and brother, the Honorable Mistah Wolfe Londoner, who has always been our true friend and brother, who always advises us to do the right thing, and stands ready, at all times, to help us in the good fight. Although he has a white skin, his heart is as black as any of ours. Brothers, the Honorable Wolfe Londoner."

There was no mistaking the authorship of this felicitous introduction.

Field was never tired of repeating another story at the expense of Mr. Londoner, in connection with the visit of Charles A. Dana to Denver. The arrival of "Mr. Dana of the New York Sun" was made the occasion for one of those receptions by the Press Club which made up in heartiness what they lacked in conventional ceremony. Mr. Londoner was the president of the club, and it not only fell to his lot to deliver the address of welcome to guests of the club, but to look after their comfort and welfare while they remained in the city, and often to provide them with the wherewithal to leave it. On Mr. Dana's presentation he was called on for some remarks, to which Mr. Londoner listened with the air of a man who had heard the same tale from lips less entitled to deliver a message of counsel and warning to a group of newspaper writers. When his guest had

finished his remarks, Mr. Londoner, according to Field's story, walked over to Mr. Dana and asked him how much he wanted.

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Mr. Dana looked at him with a puzzled air, and asked: "How much what? What do you mean?"

"Why, money," Mr. Londoner is said to have replied. "Every newspaper man who ever came to this club was introduced the same as you were, made a speech the same as you did, and then came to me to borrow money to get out of town with. Now, how much do you want?"

According to Field, he never saw a man so greatly relieved as Mr. Londoner was when Mr. Dana assured him that his hotel bill was paid and he had enough money sewed into his waistcoat to carry him back to New York, where he had a job waiting for him.

On one occasion Field accompanied the Denver Press Club on a pleasure trip to Manitou, a summer resort that nestles in a canon at the base of Mount Rosa. Before the party was comfortably settled in the hotel, Field was approached by a poor woman who had lost her husband, and who poured into his ear a sad tale of indigence and sorrow. He became immediately interested, and at once set about devising means for her relief. As his purse was as lean as her own and his companions were not overburdened with the means to get back to Denver, he announced a grand musical and dramatic entertainment, to be given in the parlors of the hotel that evening, for the benefit of a deserving charity. Every guest in the hotel was invited, and the members of the Press Club spread the notices among the citizens of the village. When asked who would be the performers, Field answered, with the utmost nonchalance, that the Lord would provide the entertainment if Manitou would furnish the audience. The evening came, and the parlors were crowded with guests and villagers, but no performers. After waiting until expectancy and curiosity had almost toppled over from tiptoe to disgust and indignation, Field stepped to the piano with preternatural gravity and attacked it with all the grand airs of a foreign virtuoso. Critics would have denied that Field was a pianist, and, technically considered, they would have been right. But his fingers had a fondness for the ivory keys, and they responded to his touch with the sweet melody of the forest to the wind. He carried all the favorite airs of all the operas he had ever heard in his fingers' ends. He knew the popular songs of the day by heart, and, where memory failed, could improvise. He had a voice for the soft and deep chords of negro melodies I have never heard surpassed, and with all, he had a command of comedy and pathos which, up to this time, was little known beyond the circle in Denver over which he reigned as the Lord of Misrule. That night in Manitou those who were present reported that, from the moment he sat down at the piano until the last note of the good-night song died away, he held that impromptu audience fascinated by his impromptu performance. By turns he sang, played, recited poetry, mimicked actors and well-known Colorado characters, told anecdotes, and altogether gave such a single-handed entertainment that the spectators did not know whether to be more astonished at its variety or delighted with its genius. The result was a generous collection, which went far to relieve the distress of the woman who had touched Field's sympathy.

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Let it not be understood that nothing more serious than some hilarious escapade or sardonic bit of humor ever crossed the life of Eugene Field in Denver. His innate hatred of humbug and sham made the Denver Tribune a terror to all public characters who considered that suddenly acquired wealth gave them a free hand to flaunt ostentatious vulgarity on all public occasions.

CHAPTER XI

COMING TO CHICAGO

What I have written thus far of Eugene Field has been based upon what the lawyers call hearsay or documentary evidence. It has for the most part been directly heard or confirmed from his own lips. In the early days of our acquaintance the stories of his life in Denver were rife through every newspaper office and green-room in the United States. No one who had spent any time in Colorado came East without bringing a fresh budget of tales of the pranks and pasquinades of Eugene Field, of the Denver Tribune. The clipping vogue of his Primer series had given him a newspaper reputation wide as the continent. He was far more quoted, however, for what he said and did than for anything he wrote. Had his career ended in 1883, before he came to Chicago, there would have been little or nothing left of literary value to keep his memory alive, beyond the regretful mention in the obituary columns of the western press.

And it came near ending, like the candle exposed to the gusts of March, or a bubble that has danced and glistened its brief moment in the sun. The boy who was too delicate for continued application to books in Amherst, who had outgrown his strength so that his entrance at Williams was postponed a year, whose backwardness at his books through three colleges had been excused on the plea of ill-health, had been living a pace too fast for a never strong and always rebellious stomach. He was not intemperate in eating or drinking. It was not excess in the first that ruined his digestion, nor intemperance in the other that caused him to become a total abstainer from all kinds of intoxicating beverages. He simply became a dyspeptic through a weird devotion to the pieces and pastries "like Mary French used to make," and he became a teetotaler because the doctors mistook the cause of his digestive distress.

The one thing of which Eugene Field was intemperate in Denver was of himself. He gave to that delicate machinery we call the body no rest. It was winter when he did not see the sun rise several times a week, and the hours he stole from daylight for sleep were too few and infrequent to make up for the nights he turned into day for work and frolic. Thus it came about that in the summer of 1883 Eugene Field had reached the end of his physical tether, and some change of scene was necessary to save what was left of an impaired constitution.

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From what has been said, it is easy to understand how Field's abilities were diverted into a new and deeper channel in 1883. "Stricken by dyspepsia," writes Mr. Cowen, "so severely that he fell into a state of chronic depression and alarm, he eagerly accepted the timely offer of Melville E. Stone, then surrounding himself with the best talent he could procure in the West, of a virtually independent desk on the Chicago Morning News. There he quickly regained health, although he never recovered from his ailment."

How Mr. Stone came to be the "Fairy Godmother" to Field at this turning-point in his life may be briefly related, and partly in Mr. Stone's own words. He and Victor F. Lawson had made a surprising success in establishing the Chicago Daily News, in December, 1875, the first one-cent evening paper in Chicago. It is related that in the early days of their enterprise they had to import the copper coins for the use of their patrons—the nickle being up to that time the smallest coin in use in the West, as the dime, or "short bit," was until a more recent date on the Pacific coast. The Daily News was more distinguished for its enterprise in gathering news and getting it out on the street before the comparative blanket sheets of the early eighties than for its editorial views or literary features.

In January, 1881, Messrs. Lawson & Stone conceived the idea of printing a morning edition of their daily, to be called the Morning News. As it was to be sold for two cents, it was their purpose to make it better worth the price by a more exacting standard in the manner of presenting its news and by the employment of special writers for its editorial page. Just then, however, the crop of unemployed writers of demonstrated ability or reputation was unusually short, and the foundation of the Chicago Herald in May of the same year, by half a dozen energetic journalists of local note, did not tend to overstock the market with the talent sought for by Messrs. Lawson & Stone. It was the rivalry between the Morning News (afterwards the Record) and the Herald, that sent Mr. Stone so far afield as Denver for a man to assist him in realizing the idea cherished by him and his associate. An interesting story could be told of that rivalry, which has just ended by the consolidation of the two papers (March, 1901) into the Chicago Record-Herald, but only so much of it as affects the life and movements of Eugene Field concerns us here.

In the early summer of 1883 Mr. Stone, who had been watching with appreciative newspaper sense the popularity of the Tribune Primer skits, cast an acquisitive net in the direction of Denver. He had known Field in St. Louis, and describes their first meeting thus: "I entered the office of the Dispatch to see Stillson Hutchins, the then proprietor of that paper. It was in the forenoon, the busy hour for an afternoon newspaper. A number of people were there, but as to the proprietor, clerks, and customers, none

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was engaged in any business, for, perched on the front counter, telling in a strangely resonant voice a very funny story, sat Eugene Field. He was a striking figure, tall, gaunt, almost bald (though little more than twenty years of age), smooth shaven, and with a remarkable face, which lent itself to every variety of emotion. In five minutes after our introduction I knew him. There was no reserve about him. He was of the free, whole-souled western type—that type which invites your confidence in return for absolute and unstinted frankness.”

Instead of broaching his purpose by letter, Mr. Stone slipped off to Denver for a personal interview with his intended victim, and, as I have already intimated, he arrived just in the nick of time to find Field ready for any move that would take him away from the killing kindness and exhilarating atmosphere of the Colorado capital. “The engagement,” says Mr. Stone, “was in itself characteristic. Field wanted to join me. He was tired of Denver and mistrustful of the limitations upon him there. But if he was to make a change, he must be assured that it was to be for his permanent good. He was a newspaper man not from choice, but because in that field he could earn his daily bread. Behind all he was conscious of great capability—not vain or by any means self-sufficient, but certain that by study and endeavor he could take high rank in the literary world and could win a place of lasting distinction. So he stipulated that he should be given a column of his own, that he might stand or fall by the excellence of his own work. Salary was less an object than opportunity.”

Mr. Stone gave the necessary assurances, both as to salary—by no means princely—and opportunity as large as Field had the genius to fill. As quickly as he could, Field closed up his Denver connections and prepared for the last move in his newspaper life. How he survived the round of farewell luncheons, dinners, and midnight suppers given for and by him was a source of mingled pride and amusement to the chief sufferer. It was with feelings of genuine regret that he turned his back on Denver and gave up the jovial and congenial association with the Tribune and its staff. Although its chief editorial writer, O.H. Rothacker, had a national reputation, Field was the star of the company that gave to the Tribune its unique reputation among the journals of the West, and all classes of citizens felt that something picturesquely characteristic of the liberty and good-fellowship of their bustling town was being taken from them. Field’s departure meant the closing of the hobble-de-hoy period in the life of Denver as well as in his own. His life there had been exactly suited to his temperament, to the times, and to the environment. It is doubtful if it would have been possible to repeat such an experience in Denver five years later, and it is certain that in five years Field had developed whole leagues of character beyond its repetition.

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It was in August, 1883, that Eugene Field, with his family and all his personal effects, except his father's library, moved to Chicago. That library was destined to remain safely stored in St. Louis for many years before he felt financially able to afford it shelter and quarters commensurate with its intrinsic value and wealth of associations. So far in his newspaper work Field had little time and less inclination to learn from books. All stories of his being a close and omnivorous student of books, previous to his coming to Chicago, are not consistent with the facts. He was learning all about humanity by constant attrition with mankind. He was taking in knowledge of the human passions and emotions at first hand and getting very little assistance through pouring over the printed observations of others. He was not a classical scholar in the sense of having acquired any mastery of or familiarity with the great Latin or Greek writers. Language, all languages, was a study that was easy to him, and he acquired facility in translating any foreign tongue, living or dead, with remarkable readiness by the aid of a dictionary and a nimble wit. Student in St. Louis, Kansas City, or Denver he was not, any more than at Williams, Galesburg, or Columbia. But I have no doubt that when Eugene Field left Denver he had a fixed intention, as suggested in the words of Mr. Stone, by study and endeavor to take high rank in the literary world and to "win a place of lasting distinction."

When he came to Chicago his family consisted of Mrs. Field and their four children, all, happily for him, in vigorous health, and, so far as the children were concerned, endowed with appetites and a digestion the envy and despair of their father. "Trotty," the eldest, was by this time a girl of eight, Melvin a stout sober youth of six, "Pinny" (Eugene, Jr.) a shrewd little rascal of four, and "Daisy" (Fred), his mother's boy, a large-eyed, sturdy youngster of nearly three masterful summers. The family was quickly settled in a small but convenient flat on Chicago Avenue, three blocks from the Lake, and a little more than a mile's walk from the office, a distance that never tempted Field to exercise his legs except on one occasion, when it afforded him a chance to astonish the natives of North Chicago. It occurred to him one bleak day in December that it was time the people knew there was a stranger in town. So he arrayed himself in a long linen duster, buttoned up from knees to collar, put an old straw hat on his head, and taking a shabby book under one arm and a palm-leaf fan in his hand, he marched all the way down Clark Street, past the City Hall, to the office. Everywhere along the route he was greeted with jeers or pitying words, as his appearance excited the mirth or commiseration of the passers-by. When he reached the entrance to the Daily News office he was followed by a motley crowd of noisy urchins whom he dismissed with a grimace and the cabalistic gesture with which Nicholas Koorn perplexed and repulsed Antony Van Corlear from the battlement of the fortress of Rensselaerstein. Then closing the door in their astonished faces, he mounted the two flights of stairs to the editorial rooms, where he recounted, with the glee of the boy he was in such things, the success of his joke.

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Trotty was his favorite child, probably because she was the only girl, and he was very fond of little girls. Even then she favored her father in complexion and features more than any of the boys, having the same large innocent-looking blue eyes. But even she had to serve his disposition to extract humor from every situation. Before Field had been in Chicago two months he realized that he had made a serious miscalculation in impressing Mr. Stone with the thought that salary was less an object to him than opportunity. Opportunity had not sufficed to meet Field's bills in Denver, and the promised salary, that seemed temptingly sufficient at the distance of a thousand miles, proved distressingly inadequate to feed and clothe three lusty boys and one growing girl in the bracing atmosphere of Chicago. So it was not surprising that when Trotty asked her father to give her an appropriate text to recite in Sunday-school, he schooled her to rise and declaim with great effect:

"The Lord will provide, my father can't!"

The means Field took to bring the insufficiency of his salary to the attention of Mr. Stone were as ingenious as they were frequent. I don't think he would have appreciated an increase of salary that came without some exercise of his wayward fancy for making mirth out of any embarrassing financial condition.

It is more than probable that Eugene Field chose Chicago for the place of his permanent abode after deliberately weighing the advantages and limitations of its situation with reference to his literary career. He felt that it was as far east as he could make his home without coming within the influence of those social and literary conventions that have squeezed so much of genuine American flavor out of our literature. He had received many tempting offers from New York newspapers before coming to Chicago, and after our acquaintance I do not believe a year went by that Field did not decline an engagement, personally tendered by Mr. Dana, to go to the New York Sun, at a salary nearly double that he was receiving here. But, as he told Julian Ralph on one occasion, he would not live in, or write for, the East. For, as he put it, there was more liberty and fewer literary "fellers" out West, and a man had more chance to be judged on his merits and "grow up with the country."

The Chicago to which Eugene Field came in 1883 was a city of something over six hundred thousand inhabitants, and pulsing with active political and commercial life. It had been rebuilt, physically, after the fire with money borrowed from the East, and was almost too busy paying interest and principal to have much time to read books, much less make them, except in the wholly manufacturing sense. It had already become a great publishing centre, but not of the books that engage the critical intelligence of the public. The feverish devotion of its citizens to business during the day-time drove them to bed at an unseasonably

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early hour, or to places of amusement, from which they went so straight home after the performances that there was not a single fashionable restaurant in the city catering to supper parties after the play. Whether this condition, making theatre-going less expensive here than in other large cities, conduced to the result or not, it was a fact that in the early eighties Chicago was the best paying city on the continent for theatrical companies of all degrees of merit. The losses which the best artists and plays almost invariably reported of New York engagements were frequently recouped in Chicago.

Chicago never took kindly to grand opera, and probably for the same reason that it patronized the drama. It sought entertainment and amusement, and grand opera is a serious business. As Field said of himself, Chicago liked music "limited"; and its liking was generally limited to light or comic opera and the entertainments of the Apollo Club, until Theodore Thomas, with admirable perseverance, aided by the pocket-books of public-spirited citizens rather than by enthusiastic music-lovers, succeeded in cultivating the study and love of music up to a standard above that of any other American city, with the possible exception of Boston.

I have referred to the theatrical and musical conditions in Chicago in 1883, because it was in them that Eugene Field found his most congenial atmosphere and associations when he came hither that year. These were the chief reminders of the life he had left behind when he turned his back on Denver, and I need scarcely say that they continued to afford him the keenest pleasure and the most unalloyed recreation to the end.

Architecturally, Chicago was no more beautiful and far less impressive than it is now. It could not boast half a dozen buildings, public or private, worthy of a second glance. Its tallest skyscraper stopped at nine stories, and that towered a good two stories over its nearest rival. The bridges across the river connecting the three divisions of the city were turned slowly and laboriously by hand, and the joke was current that a Chicagoan of those days could never hear a bell ring without starting on a run to avoid being bridged. The cable-car was an experiment on one line, and all the other street-cars were operated with horses and stopped operation at 12.20 A.M., as Field often learned to his infinite disgust, for he hated walking worse than he did horses or horse-cars. In many ways Chicago reminded Field of Denver, and in no respect more than in its primitive ways, its assumed airs of importance, and its township politics. Despite its forty odd years of incorporated life, Chicago, the third city of the United States, was still a village, and Field insisted on regarding it as such.

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Transplanted from the higher altitude at the foot of the Rockies to the level of Lake Michigan, I think nothing about Chicago struck him more forcibly than the harshness of its variable summer climate. Scarcely a week went by that his column did not contain some reference in paragraph or verse to its fickle alarming changes. He had not enough warm blood back of that large gray face to rejoice when the mercury dropped in an hour, as it often did, from 88 or 90 degrees to 56 or 60 degrees. Such changes, which came with the whirl of the weather vane, as the wind shifted from its long sweep over the prairies, all aquiver with the heat, to a strong blow over hundreds of miles of water whose temperature in dog days never rose above 60 degrees, provoked from him verses such as these, written in the respective months they celebrate in the year 1884:

CHICAGO IN JULY

The white-capp'd waves of Michigan break
On the beach where the jacksnipes croon—
The breeze sweeps in from the purple lake
And tempers the heat of noon:
In yonder bush, where the berries grow,
The Peewee tunefully sings,
While hither and thither the people go,
Attending to matters and things.

There is cool for all in the busy town—
For the girls in their sealskin sacques—
For the dainty dudes idling up and down,
With overcoats on their backs;
And the horse-cars lurch and the people run
And the bell at the bridgeway rings—
But never perspires a single one,
Attending to matters and things.

What though the shivering mercury wanes—
What though the air be chill?
The beautiful Chloe never complains
As she roams by the purpling rill;
And the torn-tit coos to its gentle mate,
As Chloe industriously swings
With Daphnis, her beau, on the old front gate,
Attending to matters and things.

When the moon comes up, and her cold, pale light
Coquettes with the freezing streams,
What care these twain for the wintry night,
Since Chloe is wrapt in dreams,



And Daphnis utters no plaint of woe
O'er his fair jack full on kings,
But smiles that fortune should bless him so,
Attending to matters and things.

CHICAGO IN AUGUST

When Cynthia's father homeward brought
An India mull for her to wear,
How were her handsome features fraught
With radiant smiles beyond compare!
And to her bosom Cynthia strained
Her pa with many a fond caress—
And ere another week had waned
That mull was made into a dress.

And Cynthia blooming like a rose
Which any swain might joy to cull,
Cried "How I'll paralyze the beaux
When I put on my India mull!"
Now let the heat of August day
Be what it may—I'll not complain—
I'll wear the mull, and put away
This old and faded-out delaine!

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Despite her prayers the heated spell
Descended not on mead and wold—
Instead of turning hot as—well,
The weather turned severely cold,
The Lake dashed up its icy spray
And breathed its chill o'er all the plain—
Cynthia stays at home all day
And wears the faded-out delaine!

So is Chicago at this time—
She stands where icy billows roll—
She wears her beauteous head sublime,
While cooling zephyrs thrill her soul.
But were she tempted to complain,
Methinks she'd bid the zephyrs lull,
That she might doff her old delaine
And don her charming India mull!_

But there was another feature of Chicago that from the day of his arrival to the day of his departure to that land where dust troubleth not and soot and filth are unknown, filled his New England soul and nostrils with ineffable disgust. He never became reconciled to a condition in which the motto *in hoc signo vinces* on a bar of soap had no power to inspire a ray of hope. He had not been here a month before his muse began to wield the “knotted lash of sarcasm” above the strenuous but dirty back of Chicago after this fashion:

*Brown, a Chicago youth, did woo
A beauteous Detroit belle,
And for a month—or, maybe, two—
He wooed the lovely lady well.*

But, oh! one day—one fatal day—
As mused the belle with naught to do,
A local paper came her way
And, drat the luck! she read it through.

She read of alleys black with mire—
A river with a putrid breath—
Streets reeking with malarial ire—
Inviting foul disease and death.

Then, with a livid snort she called
Her trembling lover to her side—

"How dare you, wretched youth," she bawled,
"Ask me to be your blushing bride?"

Go back unto your filthy town,
And never by my side be seen,
Nor hope to make me Mrs. Brown,
Until you've got your city clean!" _

Eugene Field made his first appearance in the column of the Morning News August 15th, 1883, in the most modest way, with a scant column of paragraphs such as he had contributed to the Denver Tribune, headed "Current Gossip" instead of "Odds and Ends." The heading was only a makeshift until a more distinctive one could be chosen in its stead. On August 31st, 1883, the title "Sharps and Flats" was hoisted to the top of Field's column, and there it remained over everything he wrote for more than a dozen years.

There have been many versions of how Field came to hit upon this title, so appropriate to what appeared under it. The most ingenious of these was that evolved by John B. Livingstone in "An Appreciation" of Eugene Field, published in the Interior shortly after his death. In what, on the whole, is probably the best analysis of Field's genius and work extant, Mr. Livingstone goes on to say:

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“What Virgil was to Tennyson, Horace was to Field in one aspect at least of the Venusian’s character. He could say of his affection for the protege of Maecenas, as the laureate said of his for the ‘poet of the happy Tityrus,’ ‘I that loved thee since my day began.’ It has been suggested that he owed to a clever farce-comedy of the early eighties the caption of the widely-read column of journalistic epigram and persiflage, which he filled with machine-like regularity and the versatility of the brightest French journalism for ten years. I prefer to think that he took it, or his cue for it, from a line of Dr. Phillips Francis’s translation of the eighth of the first book of Horatian Satires:

*Not to be tedious or repeat
How Flats and Sharps in concert meet.*

“Field’s knowledge of Horace and of his translators was complete, probably not equalled by that of any other member of his craft. He made a specialty of the study, a hobby of it. And it is more likely, as it is more gratifying, to believe that he caught his famous caption (Sharps and Flats) from a paraphrase of his favorite classic poet than from the play bill of a modern and ephemeral farce.”

Unfortunately for this pretty bit of speculation, which Field would have enjoyed as another evidence of his skill in imposing upon the elect of criticism, it has no foundation in fact, and its premises of Field’s intimate knowledge and devotion to Horace anticipates the period of his Horatian “hobby,” as Mr. Livingstone so well styles it, by at least five years. It was not until the winter of 1888-89 that paraphrases of Horace began to stud his column with the first-fruits of his tardy wandering and philandering with Dr. Frank W. Reilly through the groves and meadows of the Sabine farm. But that is another story.

According to M.E. Stone, the title of the column which Field established when he came to the Chicago Morning News was borrowed from the name of a play, “Sharps and Flats,” written by Clay M. Greene and myself, and played with considerable success throughout the United States by Messrs. Robson and Crane.

[Illustration: Robson. Crane.—Crane. Robson. ROBSON AND CRANE IN THE PLAY “SHARPS AND FLATS”]

It may be set down here as well as elsewhere, and still quoting Mr. Stone, that not only did Field write nearly every line that ever appeared in the “Sharps and Flats” column, but that practically everything that he ever wrote, after 1883, appeared at one time or another in that column.

To which it may be added that it has been the custom of those writing of Eugene Field to surround and endow him throughout his career with the acquirement of scholarship, and pecuniary independence, which he never possessed before the last six years of his life.

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Practically all Field's scholarship and mental equipment, so far as they were obtained from books, were acquired after he came to Chicago, and he was never lifted above the ragged edge of impecuniosity until he began to receive royalties from the popular edition of "A Little Book of Western Verse" and "A Little Book of Profitable Tales." His domestic life was spent in flats or rented houses until less than five months before his death. The photographs taken a few months before his death of Eugene Field's home and the beautiful library in which he wrote are ghastly travesties on the nomadic character of his domestic arrangements for many years before June, 1895—dreams for which he longed, but only lived to realize for four brief months. All the best Field wrote previous to 1890—and it includes the best he ever wrote, except "The Love Affairs of a Bibliomaniac"—was written in a room to which many a box stall is palatial, and his sole library was a dilapidated edition of Bartlett's "Familiar Quotations," Cruden's "Concordance of the Bible," and a well-thumbed copy of the King James version of the Bible. He detested the revised version. The genius of this man at this time did not depend on scholarship or surroundings, but on the companionship of his fellows and the unconventionality of his home life.

CHAPTER XII

PERSONAL CHARACTERISTICS

It was in the month of September, after Field's coming to the Morning News, that a managerial convulsion in the office of the Chicago Herald threw the majority of its editorial corps and special writers across Fifth Avenue into the employ of Messrs. Lawson & Stone. They were at first distributed between the morning and evening editions of the News, my first work being for the latter, to which I contributed editorial paragraphs for one week, when Mr. Stone concluded to make me his chief editorial writer on the Morning News. This brought me into immediate personal and professional relations with Field. Our rooms adjoined, being separated by a board partition that did not reach to the ceiling and over which for four years I was constantly bombarded with missives and missiles from my ever-restless neighbor. Among the other recruits from the Herald at that time was John F. Ballantyne, who, from being the managing editor of that paper, was transferred to the position of chief executive of the Morning News under Mr. Stone. One of the first duties of his position was to read Field's copy very closely, to guard against the publication of such bitter innuendoes and scandalous personalities as had kept the Denver Tribune in constant hot water between warlike descents upon the editor and costly appeals to the courts. Mr. Stone wanted all the racy wit that had distinguished Field's contributions to the Tribune without the attendant crop of libel suits, and he relied on Ballantyne's Scotch caution to put a query mark against every paragraph that squinted

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at a breach of propriety or a breach of the peace, or that invited a libel suit. There was no power of final rejection in Ballantyne's blue pencil. That was left for Mr. Stone's own decision. It was well that it was so, for Mr. Ballantyne's appreciation of humor was so rigid that, had it been the arbiter as to which of Field's paragraphs should be printed, I greatly fear me there would often have been a dearth of gayety in the "Sharps and Flats." The relations in which Ballantyne and I found ourselves to Field can best be told in the language of Mr. Cowen, whose own intimate relations with Field antedated ours and continued to the end:

"Coming immediately under the influence of John Ballantyne and Slason Thompson, respectively managing editor and chief editorial writer of the News—the one possessed of Scotch gravity and the other of fine literary taste and discrimination—the character of Field's work quickly modified, and his free and easy, irregular habits succumbed to studious application and methodical labors. Ballantyne used the blue pencil tenderly, first attacking Field's trick fabrications and suppressing the levity which found vent in preceding years in such pictures of domestic felicity as:

*Baby and I the weary night
Are taking a walk for his delight,
I drowsily stumble o'er stool and chair
And clasp the babe with grim despair,
For he's got the colic
And paregoric
Don't seem to ease my squalling heir.*

Baby and I in the morning gray
Are griping and squalling and walking away—
The fire's gone out and I nearly freeze—
There's a smell of peppermint on the breeze.
Then Mamma wakes
And the baby takes
And says, "Now cook the breakfast please." _

"The every-day practical joker and entertaining mimic of Denver recoiled in Chicago from the reputation of a Merry Andrew, the prospect of gaining which he disrelished and feared. He preferred to invent paragraphic pleasantries for the world at large and indulge his personal humor in the office, at home, or with personal friends. Gayety was his element. He lived, loved, inspired, and translated it, in the doing which latter he wrote, without strain or embarrassment, reams of prose satire, *contes risques*, and Hudibrastic verse."

It is a singular illustration of the irony and mutations of life that one of the early paragraphs Field wrote for the “Sharps and Flats” column was inspired by what was supposed to be a fatal assault on his friend by a notorious political ruffian in Leadville. The paragraph, which appeared on September 12th, 1883, is interesting as a specimen of Field’s style at that period, and as showing in what esteem he held Cowen, with whom he had been associated on the Denver Tribune and whose name recurs in these pages from time to time:

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Edward D. Cowen, the city editor of the Leadville Herald, who was murderously assaulted night before last by a desperado named Joy, was one of the brightest newspaper men in the West. He came originally from Massachusetts, and has relatives living in the southern part of Illinois. He was about thirty years of age. He went to Leadville about three months ago to work on ex-Senator Tabor's paper, the Herald, and was doing excellently well. He was a protege, to a certain extent, of Mrs. Tabor No. 2. She admired his brilliancy, and volunteered to help him in any possible way. It was speaking of him that she said: "My life will henceforth be devoted to assisting worthy young men. In life we must prepare for death, and how can we better prepare for death than by helping our fellow-creatures? Alas!" she added with a sad, sad sigh, "alas! death is, after all, what we live for." Young Cowen had all the social graces men and women admire; he was bright in intellect, great in heart, and hearty of manner. The loss of no young man we know of would be more deplored than his demise.

Cowen never wholly recovered from the effects of his encounter with Joy, but he survived to joke with Field over the past tense in which this paragraph is couched, and to afford me valuable assistance in completing this character-study of our friend.

I have already referred to the "box stall" in which Field sawed his daily wood, as he was accustomed to call his work. As the day of thinking that any old pine table, with a candle box for a chair, crowded off in any sort of a dingy garret, was good enough for the writers who contributed "copy" for a newspaper, has been succeeded by an era of quarter-sawed oak desks, swivel chairs, electric light, and soap and water in editorial quarters throughout the country, let me attempt to describe the original editorial rooms of the Daily News less than twenty years ago. The various departments of the paper occupied what had been three four-story, twenty-five-foot buildings. The floors of no two of these buildings above the first story were on the same level. They had evidently been originally built for lodging houses. The presses and storerooms for the rolls of paper filled the cellars. The business office occupied one store, which was flanked on either side by stores that would have been more respectable had they been rented as saloons, which they were not, because of the conscientious scruples of Messrs. Lawson & Stone. Parts of two of the buildings were still rented as lodgings. Up one flight of stairs of the centre building, in the front, Mr. Stone had his office, which was approached through what had been a hall bedroom. His room was furnished with black walnut, and a gloomy and oppressive air of mystery. Mr. Stone had the genius and the appearance of a chief inquisitor. He was as alert, daring, and enterprising an editor as the West has ever produced.

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The rear of this twenty-five-foot building was given up to the library and to George E. Plumbe, the editor for many years of the Daily News Almanac and Political Register. The library consisted of files of nearly all the Chicago dailies, of Congressional Records and reports, the leading almanacs, the "Statesman's Year Book," several editions of "Men of the Times," half a dozen encyclopaedias, the Imperial and Webster's dictionaries, a few other text books, and about two inches of genuine Chicago soot which incruited everything. The theory advanced by Field's friend, William F. Poole, then of the Public Library and later of the Newberry Library, that dust is the best preservative of books, rendered it necessary that the only washstand accessible to the Morning News should be located in the library. None of us ever came out of that library as we went in—the one clean roller a day forbade it. Nothing but the conscientious desire to embellish our "copy" with enough facts and references to make a showing of erudition ever induced Field or any of the active members of the editorial staff to borrow the library key from Ballantyne to break in upon the soporific labors of Mr. Plumbe. Here the editorial conferences, which Field has illustrated, were held.

[Illustration: DAILY NEWS EDITORIAL COUNCIL OF WAR. "Now, boys, which point shall we move on?" *From a drawing by Eugene Field.*]

Before quitting the library, which has since grown, in new quarters, to be one of the most comprehensive newspaper libraries in the country, I cannot forbear printing one of Field's choice bits at the expense of the occupants of this floor of the Daily News office. It has no title, but is supposed to be a soliloquy of Mr. Stone's:

*I wish my men were more like Plumbe
And not so much like me—
I hate to see the paper hum
When it should stupid be.
For when a lot of wit and rhyme
Appears upon our pages,
I know too well my men in time
Will ask a raise in wages.*

I love to sit around and chin
With folk of doubtful fame,
But oh, it seems a dreadful sin
When others do the same;
For others gad to get the news
To use in their profession,
But anything I get I use
For purpose of suppression._

Field's poetical license here does injustice to Mr. Stone, whose inquiries generally concerned matters of public or political concern and whose practice of the editorial art of

suppression was never exercised with any other motive than the public good or the sound discretion of the editor, who knew that the libel suits most to be feared were those where the truth about some scalawag was printed without having the affidavits in the vault and a double hitch on the witnesses.

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Up another long, narrow, dark stairway was the office of Mr. Ballantyne, the managing editor. He occupied what had been a rear hall bedroom, 7 x 10 feet. He was six feet two tall, and if he had not been of an orderly nature, there would not have been room in that back closet, with its one window and flat-topped desk, for his feet and the retriever, Snip—the only dog Field ever thoroughly detested. Ballantyne's room was evidently arranged to prevent any private conferences with the managing editor. It boasted a second chair, but when the visitor accepted the rare invitation to be seated, his knees prevented the closing of the door. The remainder of this floor of the centre building and the whole of the same floor of the next building south were taken up by the composing room. A door had been cut in the wall of the building to the north, just by Mr. Ballantyne's room, through which, and down three steps, was the space devoted to the editorial and reportorial staff of the Morning News. The front end of this space was partitioned off into three rooms, 7 x 12 feet each. Field claimed one of these boxes, the dramatic critic and solitary artist of the establishment one, and Morgan Bates, the exchange editor, and I were sandwiched in between them. The rest of the floor was given up to the city staff. The telegraph editor had a space railed off for his accommodation in the composing room. If a fire had broken out in the central building in those days, along about ten P.M., the subsequent proceedings of Eugene Field and of others then employed on the Morning News would probably not have been of further interest, except to the coroner.

Of the three rooms mentioned, Field's was the only one having any pretensions to decoration. Its floor and portions of the wall were stained and grained a rich brown with the juice of the tobacco plant. In one corner Field had a cupboard-shaped pigeon-file, alphabetically arranged, for the clippings he daily made—almost all relating some bit of personal gossip about people in the public eye. Scattered about the floor were dumb-bells, Indian clubs, and other gymnastic apparatus which Field never touched and which the janitor had orders not to disturb in their disorder. Above Field's desk for some time hung a sheet of tin, which he used as a call bell or to drown the noise of the office boy poking the big globe stove which was the primitive, but generally effective, way of heating the whole floor in winter. That it was not always effective, even after steam was introduced, may be inferred from the following importunate note written by Field to Collins Shackelford, the cashier, on one occasion when the former had been frozen almost numb:

DEAR MR. SHACKELFORD: There has been no steam in the third-floor editorial rooms this afternoon. Somebody must be responsible for this brutal neglect, which is of so frequent occurrence that forbearance has ceased to be a virtue. I appeal to you in the hope that you will be able to correct the outrage. Does it not seem an injustice that the writers of this paper should be put at the mercy of sub-cellar hands, who are continually demonstrating their incompetency for the work which they are supposed to do and for which they are paid?

Yours truly,

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EUGENE FIELD.
January 11, 1887.

To those familiar with the internal economy of newspaper offices it will be no news to learn that death by freezing in the editorial rooms would be regarded as a matter of small moment compared to a temperature in the press room that chilled the printing ink in the fountains to the slow consistency of molasses in January.

To return to the furnishing of the room in which Field did the greater part of his work for the Morning News. Originally it did not boast a desk. A pine table with two drawers was considered good enough for the most brilliant paragrapher in the United States, and, for all he cared, so it was. He had no special use for a desk, for at that time he carried his library in his head and wrote on his lap. I am happy in being able to present in corroboration of this a study of Eugene Field at work, drawn from life by his friend, J.L. Sclanders, then artist for the News, and also the copy of a blue print photograph, on the back of which Field wrote, "And they call this art!"

[Illustration: FIELD AT WORK. *The Caricature from a Drawing by Sclanders.*]

In explanation of these pictures, both true to life when made, it should be said that, except when there was no steam on, Field almost invariably wrote in his shirt-sleeves, generally with his waistcoat unbuttoned and his collar off, and always with his feet crossed across the corner of the desk or table. One of the first things he did on coming to the office was to take off his shoes and put on a pair of slippers with no counters around the heels, so that they slapped along the floor as he walked and hung from his toes as he wrote.

Why Field always rolled up the bottoms of his trousers on coming into the office and turned them down when he went out, I do not remember to have known. Probably it was partly on account of his contradictory nature, and partly to save the trousers from dragging, for the unloosening of his "vest" was always attended by the unbuttoning of his suspenders to permit of his sitting with greater ease upon the curve of his spine. But why he should have rolled his trousers half way up to the knee passes my comprehension, as the reason has passed from my memory, if I ever knew it.

For a long time a rusty old carpenter's saw hung on the wall of his "boudoir." Beside it were some burglars' implements, and subsequently a convict's suit hanging to a peg excited the wonder of the curious and the sarcasm of the ribald.

The table in Field's room, besides serving as a resting place for his feet, was covered with the exchanges which were passed along to him after they had passed under the scrutiny and shears of the exchange editor. When Field had gone through them with his rusty scissors they were only fit for the floor, where he strewed them with a riotous hand.

If the reader has followed thus far he has a tolerably fair notion of the unpropitious and eccentric surroundings amid which Field worked immediately after coming to Chicago. Out of this strange environment came as variegated a column of satire, wit, and personal persiflage as ever attracted and fascinated the readers of a daily newspaper.

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And now of the man himself as I first saw him. He was at that time in his thirty-third year, my junior by a year. If Eugene Field had ever stood up to his full height he would have measured slightly over six feet. But he never did and was content to shamble through life, appearing two inches shorter than he really was. Shamble is perhaps hardly the word to use. But neither glide nor shuffle fits his gait any more accurately. It was simply a walk with the least possible waste of energy. It fitted Dr. Holmes's definition of walking as forward motion to prevent falling. And yet Field never gave you the impression that he was about to topple over. His legs always acted as if they were weary and would like to lean their master up against something. As to what that something might be, he would probably have answered, "Pie."

Field's arms were long, ending in well-shaped hands, which were remarkably deft and would have been attractive had he not at some time spoiled the fingers by the nail-biting habit. His shoulders were broad and square, and not nearly as much rounded as might have been expected from his position in writing. It was not the stoop of his shoulders that detracted from his height, but a certain settling together, if I may so say, of the couplings of his backbone. He was large-boned throughout, but without the muscles that should have gone with such a frame. He would probably have described himself as tall, big, gangling. He had no personal taste or pride in clothing, and never to my knowledge came across a tailor who took enough interest in his clothes to give him the benefit of a good fit or to persuade him to choose a becoming color. For this reason he looked best-dressed in a dress suit, which he never wore when there was any possibility of avoiding it. His favorite coat was a sack, cut straight, and made from some cloth in which the various shades of yellow, green, and brown struggled for mastery.

But it was of little consequence how Field's body was clothed. He wore a 7 3-8 hat and there was a head and face under it that compelled a second glance and repaid scrutiny in any company. The photographs of Field are numerous, and some of them preserve a fair impression of his remarkable physiognomy. None of the paintings of him that I have seen do him justice, and the etchings are not much of an improvement on the paintings. The best photographs only fail because they cannot retain the peculiar deathlike pallor of the skin and the clear, innocent china blue of the large eyes. These eyes were deep set under two arching brows, and yet were so large that their deep setting was not at first apparent. Field's nose was a good size and well shaped, with an unusual curve of the nostrils strangely complementary to the curve of the arch above the eyes. There was a mole on one cheek, which Field always insisted on turning to the camera and which the photographer very generally insisted on retouching out in the finishing. Field was wont to say that no photograph of him was genuine unless that mole was "blown in on the negative." The photographs all give him a good chin, in which there was merely the suggestion of that cleft which he held marred the strength of George William Curtis's lower jaw.

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The feature of his face, if such it can be called, where all portraits failed, was the hair. It was so fine that there would not have been much of it had it been thick, and as it was quite thin there was only a shadow between it and baldness. Even its color was elusive—a cross between brown and dove color. Only those who knew Field before he came to Chicago have any impression as to the color of the thatch upon that head which never during our acquaintance stooped to a slouch hat. This typical head gear of the West had no attraction for him. The formal black or brown derby for winter and the seasonable straw hat for summer seemed necessary to tone down the frivolity of his neckties, which were chosen with a cowboy's gaudy taste. To the day of his death Field delighted to present neckties, generally of the made-up variety, to his friends, which, it is needless to say, they never failed to accept and seldom wore. Often in the afternoon as it neared two o'clock he would stick his head above the partition between our rooms and say, "Come along, Nomp" (his familiar address for the writer). "Come along and I'll buy you a new necktie."

"The dickens take your neckties!" or something like it, would be my reply.

Whereupon, with the philosophy of which he never wearied, Field would rejoin, "Very well, if you won't let me buy you a necktie, you must buy me a lunch," and off we would march to Henrici's coffee-house around the corner on Madison Street, generally gathering Ballantyne and Snip in our train as we passed the kennel of the managing editor of what was to be the newspaper with the largest morning circulation in Chicago.

CHAPTER XIII

RELATIONS WITH STAGE FOLK

Reference has been made to Field's predilection for the theatrical profession and to his fondness for the companionship of those who had attained prominence in it. During his stay in Denver he had established friendly, and in some instances intimate, relations with the star actors who included that city in the circuit of their yearly pilgrimages. The story of how he ingratiated himself into the good graces of Christine Nilsson, at the expense of a rival newspaper, may be of interest before taking a final farewell of the episodes connected with his life in Colorado. When Madame Nilsson was journeying overland in her special drawing-room car with Henry Abbey, Marcus Meyer, and Charles Mathews, Field wrote to Omaha, anticipating their arrival there, to make inquiry as to how the party employed the dull hours of travel so as to interest the erratic prima donna. It was his intention to prepare a newspaper sketch of the trip.

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The reply was barren of incident, save a casual allusion to certain sittings at the American game of poker, in which the Swedish songstress had the advantage of the policy or the luck of her companions. Out of this inch of cloth Field manufactured something better than the proverbial ell of very interesting gossip. The reconstructed item reached San Francisco as soon as Madame Nilsson, and was copied from the Tribune into the coast papers on the eve of her opening concert. Now, the madame thought that the American world looked askance at a woman who gambled, and when the article was kindly brought to her attention she flew into one of those rages which, report has said, were the real tragedies of her life. When returning overland to Denver, Abbey telegraphed ahead to Field, and he, with Cowen, went up to Cheyenne to meet the party. On entering the drawing-room car the visitors were hurried into Abbey's compartment with an air of bewildering mystery, and were there informed in whispers that Madame Nilsson was furious against the Tribune and would never forgive anybody attached to it.

"Oh, I'll arrange that," said Field. "Don't announce us, but let us call on the madame and be introduced."

After some further parley this was done, and this is how he was greeted.

"Meestair Field—zee—T-r-ee-bune," Madame Nilsson exclaimed hotly. "I prefer not zee acquaintance of your joor-nal."

"Excuse me, madam," persisted Field, blandly and with grave earnestness, "I think from what Mr. Abbey has told us that you are bent on doing the Tribune and its staff a great injustice. It was not the Tribune that published the poker story that caused you so much just annoyance. It was our rival, the Republican, a very disreputable newspaper, which is edited by persons without the least instinct of gentlemen and with no consideration for the feelings of a lady of your refined sensibilities."

At this Madame Nilsson thawed visibly, and promptly appealed to Abbey, Mathews, and Mayer to learn if she had been misinformed. They, of course, fell in with Field's story, and upon being assured that she was in error the madame's anger relaxed, and she was soon holding her sides from laughter at Field's drolleries. The result was that the innocent Republican staff could not get within speaking distance of Madame Nilsson during her stay in Denver. The second night of her visit being Christmas eve, the madame held her Christmas tree in the Windsor Hotel, with Field acting the role of Santa Claus and the Tribune staff playing the parts of good little boys, while their envious rivals of the Republican were not invited to share in the crumbs that fell from that Christmas supper-table.

"I have been a great theatre-goer," says Field in his "Auto-Analysis." And it may be doubted if any writer of our time repaid the stage as generously for the pleasure he received from those who walked its boards before and behind the footlights. No better

analysis of his relations to the profession has been made than that from the pen of his friend Cowen:

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“At the very outset of his newspaper career,” says he, “Field’s inclinations led him to the society of the green-room. Of western critics and reviewers he was the first favorite among dramatic people. Helpful, kind, and enthusiastic, he was rarely severe and never captious. Though in no sense an analyst, he was an amusing reviewer and a great advertiser. Once he conceived an attachment for an actor or actress, his generous mind set about bringing such fortunate person more conspicuously into public notice. Emma Abbott’s baby, which she never had, and of whose invented existence he wrote at least a bookful of startling and funny adventures; Francis Wilson’s legs; Sol Smith Russell’s Yankee yarns; Billy Crane’s droll stories; Modjeska’s spicy witticisms—these and other jocular pufferies, quoted and read everywhere with relish for years—were among his hobby-horse performances begun at that time (1881) and continued long after he had settled down in the must and rust of bibliomania.”

For a long time not a week went by that Field did not invent some marvellous tale respecting Emma Abbott, once the most popular light-opera prima donna of the American stage—every yarn calculated to widen the circle of her popularity. Upon an absolutely fictitious autobiography of Miss Abbott he once exhausted the fertility of his fancy in the form of a review,[1] which went the rounds of the press and which, on her death, contributed many a sober paragraph to the newspaper reviews of her life.

[1] Vide Appendix.

To the fame of another opera singer of those days he contributed, by paragraphs of an entirely different flavor from those that extolled the Puritan virtues and domestic felicities of Miss Abbott (Mrs. Wetherell), as may be judged from the following “Love Plaint,” written shortly after he came to Chicago:

*The tiny birdlings in the tree
Their tuneful tales of love relate—
Alas, no lover comes to me—
I flock alone, without a mate.*

Mine eyes are hot with bitter tears,
My soul disconsolately yearns—
But, ah, no wooing knight appears—
In vain my quenchless passion burns.

Unheeded are my glowing charms—
No heroes claim a moonlight tryst—
All empty are my hungry arms—
My virgin cheeks are all unkissed.

Oh, would some cavalier might haste
To crown me with his manly love,

And, with his arm about my waist,
Feed on my cherry lips above.

Alas, my blush and bloom will fade,
And I shall lose my dulcet notes—
Then I shall die an old, old maid,
And none will mourn Miss Alice Oates._

[Illustration: FRANCIS WILSON.]

Of his friendship with Francis Wilson there is no need to write here, for is it not fully set forth in that charming little brochure, in which Mr. Wilson gives to the world a characteristic sketch of the Eugene Field and bibliomaniac he knew, and in whose work he was so deeply interested? But Mr. Wilson does not tell how he was pursued and plagued with the following genial invention which Field printed in his column in 1884, and which still occasionally turns up in country exchanges:

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“Mr. Francis Wilson, the comedian, is a nephew of Pere Hyacinthe, the ancient divine. During his recent sojourn in Paris he was the pere’s guest, and finally became deeply interested in the great work of reform in which the famous preacher is engaged. His intimate acquaintances say that Mr. Wilson is fully determined to retire from the stage at the expiration of five years and devote himself to theological pursuits. He gave Pere Hyacinthe his promise to this effect, and his sincerity is undoubted.”

William Florence, the comedian, was an actor of whom, on and off the stage, Field never wearied. Night after night would we go to see “Billy,” as he was familiarly and irreverently called, as Bardwell Slote in the “Mighty Dollar,” or as Captain Cuttle in “Dombey and Son.” Although originally an Irish comedian of rollicking and contagious humor, Florence had played “Bardwell Slote” so constantly and for so many years that his voice and manner in every-day life had the ingratiating tone of that typical Washington lobbyist. Before his death, while touring with Jefferson as Sir Lucius O’Trigger in “The Rivals,” he renewed his earlier triumphs in Irish character, but, even here the accents of the oily Bardwell gave an additional touch of blarney to his brogue.

One of the stories that Field delighted to tell of Florence dates back to 1884, when Monseigneur Capel was in the United States. It related with the circumspection of verity how Florence and the Monseigneur had been friends for a number of years. Meeting on the street in Chicago, the story ran, after a general conversation Florence asked Capel whether he ever spent an evening at the theatre, intending, in case of an affirmative reply, to invite him to one of his performances. Capel shook his head. “No,” said he, “it has been twenty-four years since I attended a theatre, and I cannot conscientiously bring myself to patronize a place where the devil is preached.” Florence protested that the monseigneur placed a false estimate on the theatrical profession.

“Ah, no,” replied Capel, with a sad smile; “you people are sincere enough; you don’t know it, but you preach the devil all the same.”

“Well, your grace,” inquired Florence, with great urbanity, “which is worse, preaching the devil from the stage without knowing it, or preaching Christ crucified from the pulpit without believing it?”

“Both are reprehensible,” replied Monseigneur Capel; and, bowing stiffly, he went his way, while Florence shrugged his shoulders a la his own fascinating creation of Jules Obenreizer in “No Thoroughfare,” and walked off in the opposite direction, whistling to himself as he walked.

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Florence delighted in companionship and in the good things and good stories of the table, whether at a noon breakfast which lasted well through the afternoon or at the midnight supper which knew no hour for breaking up, and he never came to Chicago that we did not accommodate our convenience to his late hours for breakfast or supper. Nothing short of a concealed stenographer could have done these gatherings justice. Mr. Stone footed the bills, and Field, Florence, Edward J. McPhelim of the Chicago Tribune, poet and dramatic critic, and three or four others of the Daily News staff did the rest. The eating was good, although the dishes were sometimes weird, the company was better, the stories, anecdotes, reminiscences, songs, and flow of soul beyond compare. Field, who ate sparingly and touched liquor not at all, unless it was to pass a connoisseurs judgment upon some novel, strange, and rare brand, divided the honors of the hour with the entire company.

In acknowledgment of such attentions, Florence always insisted that before the close of his engagements we should all be his guests at a regular Italian luncheon of spaghetti at Caproni's, down on Wabash Avenue. It is needless to say that the spaghetti was merely the central dish, around which revolved and was devoured every delicacy that Florence had ever heard of in his Italian itinerary, the whole washed down with strange wines from the same sunny land. Florence's fondness for this sort of thing gave zest to a story Field told of his friend's experience in London, in the summer of 1890. The epicurean actor had made an excursion up the Thames with a select party of English clubmen. Two days later Florence was still abed at Morley's, and, as he said, contemplated staying there forever. Sir Morell Mackenzie was called to see him. After sounding his lungs, listening to his heart, thumping his chest and back, looking at his tongue, and testing his breath with medicated paper, Sir Morell said:

"As near as I can get at it, you are a victim of misplaced confidence. You have been training with the young bucks when you should have been ploughing around with the old stags. You must quit it. Otherwise it will do you up."

"Well now," said Florence, as related by Field, "that was the saddest day of my life. Just think of shutting down on the boys, after being one of them for sixty years! But Sir Morell told the truth. The Garrick Club boys were terribly mad about it; they said Sir Morell was a quack, and they adopted resolutions declaring a lack of confidence in his medical skill. But my mind was made up. 'Billy,' says I to myself, 'you must let up, you've made a record; it's a long one and an honorable one. Now you must retire. Your life henceforth shall be reminiscent and its declining years shall be hallowed by the refulgent rays of retrospection.' To that resolution I have adhered steadily. People tell me that I am as young as ever; but no, they can't fool me, I know better."

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[Illustration: WILLIAM J. FLORENCE.]

Whereupon, according to Field, “Joe” Jefferson broke in incredulously: “Just to illustrate the folly of all that talk, I’ll tell you what I saw last night. When I returned to the hotel, after the play, I went up to Billy’s room and found Billy and the President of the Philadelphia Catnip Club at supper. What do you suppose they had? Stewed terrapin and frapped champagne!”

“That’s all right enough,” exclaimed Mr. Florence. “Terrapin and champagne never hurt anybody; I have had ’em all my life. What I maintain is that people of my age should not and cannot indulge in extravagance of diet. The utmost simplicity must be the rule of their life. If Joe would only eat terrapin and drink champagne he wouldn’t be grunting around with dyspepsia all the time. He lives on boiled mutton and graham bread, and the public call him ‘the reverend veteran Joseph Jefferson.’ I stick to terrapin, green turtle, canvasbacks, and the like, and every young chap in the land slaps me on the back, calls me Billy, and regards me as a contemporary. But I ain’t; I’m getting old—not too old, but just old enough!”

A dozen years with the boys had done for Field’s digestion what the robust Florence was dreading after sixty, and to the day of his death, Field, from the rigid practice of his self-denial, pitied and sympathized with the unhappy wight who had received the warning given to Florence, “You must quit training with the boys, otherwise it will do you up.” But he had no more obeyed the warning as to coffee and pie than Florence did as to the injunction of Sir Morell against terrapin and champagne.

[Illustration: COMMODORE CRANE. *From a drawing by Eugene Field.*]

Another “Billy,” William H. Crane, was one of Field’s favorites, and the one with whose name he took the greatest liberties in his column of “Sharps and Flats.” His waggish mind found no end of humor in creating a son for Mr. Crane, who was christened after his father’s stage partner, Stuart Robson Crane. This child of Field’s sardonic fancy was gifted with all the roguish attributes that are the delight and despair of fond parents. Scarcely a month, sometimes hardly a week, went by that Field did not print some yarn about the sayings or doings of the obstreperous Stuart Robson Crane. Every anecdote that he heard he adapted to the years and supposed circumstances of “Master Crane.” The close relations which existed between Field and the Cranes—for he included Mrs. Crane within the inner circle of his good-fellowship—may be judged from the following tribute:

MRS. BILLY CRANE

A woman is a blessing, be she large or be she small,
Be she wee as any midget, or as any cypress tall:
And though I’m free to say I like all women folks the best,

I think I like the little women better than the rest—
And of all the little women I'm in love with I am fain
To sing the praises of the peerless Mrs. Billy Crane.

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I met this charming lady—never mind how long ago—
In that prehistoric period I was reckoned quite a beau:
You'd never think it of me if you chanced to see me now,
With my shrunken shanks and dreary eyes and deeply furrowed brow;
But I was young and chipper when I joined that brisk campaign
At Utica to storm the heart of Mrs. Billy Crane.

We called her Ella in those days, as trim a little minx
As ever fascinated man with coquetries, methinks!
I saw her home from singing-school a million times I guess,
And purred around her domicile three winters, more or less,
And brought her lozenges and things—alas: 'twas all in vain—
She was predestined to become a Mrs. Billy Crane!

That Mr. Billy came in smart and handsome, I'll aver,
Yet, with all his brains and beauty, he's not good enough for her:
Now, though I'm somewhat homely and in gumption quite a dolt,
The quality of goodness is my best and strongest holt,
And as goodness is the only human thing that doesn't wane,
I wonder she preferred to wed with Mr. Billy Crane.

Yet heaven has blessed her all these years—she's just as blithe and gay
As when the belle of Utica, and she ain't grown old a day!
Her face is just as pretty and her eyes as bright as then—
Egad! their gracious magic makes me feel a boy again,
And still I court (as still I were a callow, York State swain)
With hecatombs of lozenges that Mrs. Billy Crane!

That she has heaps of faculty her husband can't deny—
Whenever he don't toe the mark she knows the reason why:
She handles all the moneys and receipts, which as a rule
She carries around upon her arm in a famous reticule,
And Billy seldom gets a cent unless he can explain
The wherefores and etceteras to Mrs. Billy Crane!

Yet O ye gracious actors! with uppers on your feet,
And O ye bankrupt critics! athirst for things to eat—
Did you ever leave her presence all unrequited when
In an hour of inspiration you struck her for a ten?
No! never yet an applicant there was did not obtain
A solace for his misery from Mrs. Billy Crane.

Dear little Lady-Ella! (let me call you that once more,
In memory of the happy days in Utica of yore)

If I could have the ordering of blessings here below,
I might keep some small share myself, but most of 'em should go
To you—yes, riches, happiness, and health should surely rain
Upon the temporal estate of Mrs. Billy Crane!

You're coming to Chicago in a week or two and then.
In honor of that grand event, I shall blossom out again
In a brand-new suit of checkered tweed and a low-cut satin vest
I shall be the gaudiest spectacle in all the gorgeous West!
And with a splendid coach and four I'll meet you at the train—
So don't forget the reticule, dear Mrs. Billy Crane!_

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And he may doubt, who never knew this master torment, that Field carried out his threat to appear at Crane's "first night" with that low-cut satin vest and that speckled tweed suit, which did indeed make him a gaudy spectacle. But his solemn face gave no sign that his mixed apparel was making him the cynosure of all curious eyes.

Mr. Crane suffered from the same digestive troubles that confined Florence to terrapin and champagne and Field to coffee and pies, and so the state of his health was a constant source of paragraphic sympathy in "Sharps and Flats." In such paragraphs the actor and President Cleveland were often represented as fellow-fishermen at Buzzard's Bay—Crane's summer home being at Cohasset. How they were associated is illustrated in the following casual item:

Mr. William H. Crane, the actor, is looking unusually robust this autumn. He seems to have recovered entirely from the malady which made life a burden to him for several years. He thought there was something the matter with his liver. Last July he put in a good share of his time blue-fishing with Grover Cleveland. One day they ran out of bait.

"Wonder if they'd bite at liver?" asked Crane.

"They love it," answered Cleveland.

So without further ado Crane out with his penknife, amputated his liver, and minced it up for bait. He hasn't had a sick day since.

By way of introduction to a few words respecting the close, quizzical, and always sincere friendship that existed between Field and Helena Modjeska, the following invention of March 29th, 1884, may serve to indicate the blithesome spirit with which he tortured facts when racketting around for something to add to the bewilderment of his readers and his own relaxation:

A letter from Mr. William H. Crane imparts some interesting gossip touching the Cincinnati dramatic festival. It says that an agreeable surprise awaits the patrons of the festival in an interchange of parts between Madame Modjeska and Mr. Stuart Robson, the comedian; that is to say, Modjeska will take Mr. Robson's place in the "Two Dromios," and Robson will take Madame Modjeska's place in the great emotional play of "Camille." It is well known that Modjeska has a penchant for masculine roles, and her success as Rosalind and Viola leaves no room for doubt that she will give great satisfaction in the "Comedy of Errors." Mr. Robson has never liked female roles, but his falsetto voice, his slender figure, his smooth, rosy face, and his graceful, effeminate manners qualify him to a remarkable degree for the impersonation of feminine characters. Moreover, his long residence in Paris has given him a thorough appreciation and elaborate knowledge of those characteristics, which must be understood ere one can delineate and portray the subtleties of Camille as they should be given. Those who anticipate a farcical treatment of Dumas's creation at Mr.

Robson's hands will be most wofully surprised when they come to witness and hear his artistic presentation of the most remarkable of emotional roles.

[Illustration: MODJESKA.]

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Elsewhere I have referred to the roguish pleasure Field took in ascribing the authorship of “The Wanderer” to Helena Modjeska. That was before he came to Chicago, and seemed to be the overture to a friendship that continued to exchange its favors and tokens of affection to the close of his life. The doings of the Madame and Count Bozenta, her always vivacious and enjoyable husband, were perennial subjects for Field’s kindest paragraphs. As he says, he was a great theatre-goer, but Field became a constant one when “Modjesky” came to town. Her Camille—a character in which she was not excelled by the great Bernhardt herself—had a remarkable vogue in the early eighties. She imparted to its impersonation the subtle charm of her own sweet womanliness, which served to excuse Armand’s infatuation and as far as possible lifted the play out of its unwholesome atmosphere of French immorality to the plane of romantic devotion and self-sacrifice. Her Camille seemed a victim of remorseless destiny, a pure soul struggling amid inexorable circumstances that racked and cajoled a diseased and suffering body into the maelstrom of sin.

Field was so constituted that, without this saving grace of womanliness, the presentation of Camille, with all its hectic surroundings, would have repelled him. He did not care to see Mademoiselle Bernhardt a second time in the role, and he fled from the powerful and fascinating portrayal of pulmonary emotion which initiated the audiences of Clara Morris into the terrors of tubercular disease. Night after night, when Modjeska played Camille, Field would occupy a front seat or a box. When so seated that his presence could not be overlooked from the stage, he was wont to divert Camille from her woes with the by-play of his mobile features. Wherever he sat, his large, white, solemn visage had a fascination for Madame Modjeska, and from the time she caught sight of it until Camille settled back lifeless in the final scene, she played “at him.” He repaid this tribute by distorting his face in agony when Camille was light-hearted, and by breaking into noiseless merriment as her woes were causing handkerchiefs to flutter throughout the audience. When we went to visit her next day, as we often did, she scarcely ever failed to reproach him in some such fashion as: “Ah, Meester Fielt, why will you seet in the box and talk with your overcoat on the chair to make Camille laugh who is dying on the stage? Ah, Meester Fielt, you are a very bad man, but I lof you, don’t we, Charlie?” And the count always stopped rolling a cigarette long enough to acknowledge that Field was their dearest friend and that they both loved him, no matter what he did. Next to his wife, the count was devoted to politics, which he discusses with all the warmth and gesticulations of a Frenchman and the intelligence of a Polish-American patriot.

[Illustration: FIELD WITNESSING MODJESKA AS CAMILLE. *From a drawing by Eugene Field.*]

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If there were any other visitors present, Modjeska always insisted on Field's giving his imitation of herself in *Camille*, in which he rendered her lines with exaggerated theatrical sentiment and with the broken-English accent, such as Modjeska permitted herself in the freedom of private life. She would give him Armand's cues for particular speeches and his impassioned "Armo, I lof, I lof you!" never failed to convulse her, while his pulmonary cough was so deep and sepulchral that it rang through the hotel corridors, making other guests think that Modjeska herself was in the last stages of a disease she simulated unto death nightly. After Field had added colored inks to his stock in trade, these fits of coughing were succeeded by a handkerchief act, in which the dying *Camille* appeared to spit blood in carmine splotches. No burlesque that I have seen of a play frequently burlesqued ever approached the side-splitting absurdity of these rehearsals for the benefit of the heroine of "Modjesky as Cameel."

An', while Modjesky stated we wuz somewhat off our base, I half opined she liked it by the look upon her face, I rekollect that Hoover regretted he done wrong In throwin' that there actor through a vista ten miles long.

When Field went to California in search of health, in the winter of 1893-94, Madame Modjeska placed her ranch, located ten miles from the railway, half-way between San Diego and Los Angeles, at his disposal. The ranch contained about a thousand acres, and he was given carte blanche to treat it as his own during his stay—a privilege he would have hastened to invite all his friends to share had his health been equal to the opportunity to indulge in merry-making.

[Illustration: TWO PROFILES OF EUGENE FIELD. *The upper one drawn in pencil by Field himself; the lower one by Modjeska. Reproduced from a fly-leaf of Mrs. Thompson's volume of autograph verse.*]

At a breakfast given to Modjeska at Kinsley's, April 22d, 1886, Field read the following poem in honor of the guest:

TO HELENA MODJESKA

In thy sweet self, dear lady guest, we find
Juliet's dark face, Viola's gentle mien,
The dignity of Scotland's martyr'd queen—
The beauty and the wit of Rosalind.
What wonder, then, that we who mop our eyes
And sob and gush when we should criticise—

Charmed by the graces of your mien and mind—
What wonder we should hasten to proclaim
The art that has secured thy deathless fame?
And this we swear: We will endorse no name



But thine alone to old Melpomene,
Nor will revolve, since rising sons are we,
Round any orb, save, dear Modjeska, thee
Who art our Pole star, and will ever be._

As originally written by Field, the rhymes in the first four lines of this tribute fell alternately, the lines being transposed so that they ran in order first, third, fourth, and second of the poem as it appears above. For the fifth and sixth lines of his first version Field wrote:

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*What wonder, then, that we who mop our eyes
When we are hired to rail and criticise?*

It is a question the reader can decide for himself whether his second thought was an improvement. His original intention contemplated a longer poem, but after he had written a fourteenth line that read:

The radiant Pole star of the mimic stage—

Field concluded to wind it up with the fourteenth line, as in the finished version.

Upon the back of the original manuscript of these lines to Madame Modjeska I find this Sapphic fragment under the line—suggestive of its subject, “The Things of Life”:

*A little sour, a little sweet,
Fill out our brief and human hour,
meet*

He never filled out the blank or gave a clue as to what further reflections on the springs of life were in his mind.

I never knew Field to be as infatuated with any stage production as with the first performance of the pirated edition of “The Mikado” in Chicago, in the summer of 1885. The cast was indeed a memorable one, including Roland Reed as Koko, Alice Harrison as Yum-Yum, Belle Archer as Pitti-Sing, Frederick Archer as Pooh-Bah, George Broderick as the Mikado, and Mrs. Broderick as Katisha. The Brodericks had rich church-choir voices, Belle Archer was a beauty of that fresh, innocent type that did one’s eyes good simply to look upon, and she was just emerging into a career that grew in popularity until her untimely death. Archer was a stilted English comedian who seemed built to be “insulted” as Pooh-Bah, while Roland Reed and Miss Harrison were two comedians of the first rank. As a singing soubrette, daring, versatile, and popular, Miss Harrison had no superiors in her day. The entire company was saturated with the spirit and “go” of Gilbert, and fairly tingled with the joyous music of Sullivan. The fact that the production was of a pirated version, untrammelled by the oversight of D’Oyley Carte, added zest to the performance and enlisted Field’s partisan sympathy and co-operation from the start. He enjoyed each night’s performance with all the relish of a boy eating the apples of pleasure from a forbidden orchard. When the season came to an end, as all good things must, Field, Ballantyne, and I went to Milwaukee to see that our friends had a fair start there. We got back to Chicago on the early morning milk train, and in “Sharps and Flats” the next day Field recorded the definitive judgment that “Miss Alice Harrison, in her performance of Yum-Yum in Gilbert and Sullivan’s new opera of ‘The Mikado,’ has set the standard of that interesting role, and it is a high one. In fact, we doubt whether it will ever be approached by any other artist on the American stage.”

It never has been approached, nor has the opera, so far as my information goes, ever been given with the same Gilbertian verve and swing. The subsequent performance of "The Mikado" by the authorized company, seen throughout the United States, seemed by comparison "like water after wine."

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On the operatic stage Madame Sembrich was by all odds Field's favorite prima donna. He was one of the earliest writers on the press to recognize the wonderful beauty of the singer's voice and the perfection of her method. He easily distinguished between her trained faculty and the bird-like notes of Patti, but the personality of the former won him, where he remained unmoved when Patti's wonderful voice rippled through the most difficult, florid music like crystal running water over the smooth stones of a mountain brook. Field's admiration for Sembrich often found expression in more conventional phrases, but never in a form that better illustrated how she attracted him than in the following amusing comment on her appearance in Chicago, January 24th, 1884, in Lucia:

It is not at all surprising that Madame Sembrich caught on so grandly night before last. She is the most comfortable-looking prima donna that has ever visited Chicago. She is one of your square-built, stout-rigged little ladies with a bright, honest face and bouncing manners. Her arms are long but shapely, and in the last act of Lucia her luxurious black hair tumbles down and envelopes her like a mosquito net. Her audience night before last was a coldly critical one, of course, and it sat like a bump on a log until Sembrich made her appearance in the mad scene, where Lucheer gives her vocal circus in the presence of twenty-five Scotch ladies in red, white, and green dresses, and twenty-five supposititious Scotch gentlemen in costumes of the Court of Louis XIV. Instead of sending for a doctor to assist Lucheer in her trouble, these fantastically attired ladies and gentlemen stand around and look dreary while Lucheer does ground and lofty tumbling, and executes pirouettes and trapeze performances in the vocal art. Then the audience began to wake up. The comfortable-looking little prima donna gathered herself together and let loose the cyclone of her genius and accomplishments. It was a whirlwind of appoggiaturas, semi-quavers, accenturas, rinforzandos, moderatos, prestos, trills, sforzandos, fortes, rallentandos, supertonics, salterellos, sonatas, ensembles, pianissimos, staccatos, accellerandos, quasi-innocents, cadenzas, symphones, cavatinas, arias, counter-points, fiorituras, tonics, sub-medicants, allegrissimos, chromatics, concertos, andantes, etudes, larghettos, adagios, and every variety of turilural and dingus known to the minstrel art. The audience was paralyzed. When she finally struck up high F sharp in the descending fourth of D in alt, one gentleman from the South Side who had hired a dress-coat for the occasion broke forth in a hearty "Brava!" This encouraged a resident of the North Side to shout "Bravissimo," and then several dudes from the Blue Island district raised the cry of "Bong," "Tray beang," and "Brava!" The applause became universal—it spread like wild-fire. The vast audience seemed

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crazed with delight and enthusiasm. And it argues volumes for the culture of our enterprising and fair city that not one word of English was heard among the encouraging and approving shouts that were hurled at the smiling prima donna. Even the pork merchants and the grain dealers in the family circle vied with each other in hoarsely wafting Italian words of cheer at the triumphant Sembrich. French was hardly good enough, although it was utilized by a few large manufacturers and butterine merchants who sat in the parquet, and one man was put out by the ushers because he so far forgot himself and the eclat of the occasion as to shout in vehement German: “Mein Gott in himmel—das ist ver tampt goot!” It was an ovation, but it was no more than Sembrich deserved—bless her fat little buttons!

Remember, this was nearly twenty years ago. It argues much for the saneness of Field’s enthusiasm, as well as for the perfection of Madame Sembrich’s methods, that she is still able to arouse a like enthusiasm in audiences where true dramatic instinct and high vocal art are valued as the rarest combination on the operatic stage.

Two manuscript poems in my scrap-book testify that another songster, early in Field’s Chicago life, enjoyed his friendship and inspired his pen along a line it was to travel many a tuneful metre. The first, with frequent erasures and interlineations, bears date May 25th, 1894, and was inscribed, “To Mrs. Will J. Davis.” It runs as follows:

A HUSHABY SONG

The stars are twinkling in the skies,
The earth is lost in slumber deep—
So hush, my sweet, and close your eyes
And let me lull your soul to sleep;
Compose thy dimpled hands to rest,
And like a little birdling lie
Secure within thy cosy nest
Upon my mother breast
And slumber to my lullaby;
So hushaby, oh, hushaby.

The moon is singing to the star
The little song I sing to you,
The father Sun has strayed afar—
As baby’s sire is straying, too,
And so the loving mother moon
Sings to the little star on high,
And as she sings, her gentle tune
Is borne to me, and thus I croon



To thee, my sweet, that lullaby
Of hushaby, oh, hushaby.

There is a little one asleep
That does not hear his mother's song,
But angel-watchers as I weep
Surround his grave the night-tide long;
And as I sing, my sweet, to you,
Oh, would the lullaby I sing—
The same sweet lullaby he knew
When slumbering on this bosom, too—
Were borne to him on angel wing!
So hushaby, oh, hushaby._

The second of these songs bears the same title as one of Field's favorite tales, and is inscribed, "To Jessie Bartlett Davis on the first anniversary of her little boy's birth, October 6th, 1884":

THE SINGER MOTHER

A Singer sang a glorious song
So grandly clear and subtly sweet,
That, with huzzas, the listening throng
Cast down their tributes at her feet.

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The Singer heard their shouts the while,
But her serene and haughty face
Was lighted by no flattered smile
Provoked by homage in that place.

The Singer sang that night again
In mother tones, tender and deep,
Not to the public ear, but when
She rocked her little one to sleep.

The song we bless through all the years
As memory's holiest, sweetest thing,
Instinct with pathos and with tears—
The song that mothers always sing.

So tuneful was the lullaby
The mother sang, her little child
Cooed, oh! so sweetly in reply,
Stretched forth its dimpled hands and smiled.

The Singer crooning there above
The cradle where her darling lay
Snatched to her breast her smiling love
And sang his soul to dreams away.

Oh, mother-love, that knows no guile,
That's deaf to flatt'ry, blind to art,
A dimpled hand hath wooed thy smile—
A baby's cooing touched thy heart._

[Illustration: JESSIE BARTLETT DAVIS.]

Lest my readers should conclude from these early specimens of Field's fondness for lilting lullabies that the gentler sex and "mother love" blinded him to the manly attractions and true worth of his own sex, let the following never-to-be-forgotten ode to the waistcoat of the papa of the hero of the two preceding songs bear witness. Mr. Davis has been a manager of first-class theatres and theatrical companies for a score of years, and there are thousands to testify that in the rhymes that follow Field has done no more than justice to the amazing "confections" in wearing apparel he affected in the days when we were boys together:

*Of waistcoats there are divers kinds, from those severely chaste
To those with fiery colors dight or with fair figures traced:
Those that high as liver-pads and chest-protectors serve,*

*While others proudly sweep away in a subtomachic curve,
But the grandest thing in waistcoats in the streets in this great
and wondrous west
Is that which folks are wont to call the Will J. Davis vest!*

This paragon of comeliness is cut nor low nor high
But just enough of both to show a bright imported tie:
Bound neatly with the choicest silks its lappets wave-like roll,
While a watch-chain dangles sprucely from the proper buttonhole
And a certain sensuous languor is ineffably expressed
In the contour and the mise en scene of the Will J. Davis vest.

Its texture is of softest silk: Its colors, ah, how vain
The task to name the splendid hues that in that vest obtain!
Go, view the rainbow and recount the glories of the sight
And number all the radiances that in its glow unite,
And then, when they are counted, with pride be it confessed
They're nil beside the splendor of the Will J. Davis vest.

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Sometimes the gorgeous pattern is a sportive pumpkin vine,
At other times the lily and the ivy intertwine:
And then again the ground is white with purple polka dots
Or else a dainty lavender with red congestive spots—
In short, there is no color, hue, or shade you could suggest
That doesn't in due time occur in a Will J. Davis vest.

Now William is not handsome—he's told he's just like me.
And in one respect I think he is, for he's as good as good can be!
Yet, while I find my chances with the girls are precious slim,
The women-folks go wildly galivanting after him:
And after serious study of the problem I have guessed
That the secret of this frenzy is the Will J. Davis vest.

I've stood in Colorado and looked on peaks of snow
While prisoned torrents made their moan two thousand feet below:
The Simplon pass and prodigies Vesuvian have I done,
And gazed in rock-bound Norway upon the midnight sun—
Yet at no time such wonderment, such transports filled my breast
As when I fixed my orbs upon a Will J. Davis vest.

All vainly have I hunted this worldly sphere around
For a waistcoat like that waistcoat, but that waistcoat can't be found!
The Frenchman shrugs his shoulders and the German answers "nein,"
When I try the haberdasheries on the Seine and on the Rhine,
And the truckling British tradesman having trotted out his best
Is forced to own he can't compete with the Will J. Davis vest.

But better yet, Dear William, than this garb of which I sing
Is a gift which God has given you, and that's a priceless thing.
What stuff we mortals spin and weave, though pleasing to the eye,
Doth presently corrupt, to be forgotten by and by.
One thing, and one alone, survives old time's remorseless test—
The valor of a heart like that which beats beneath that vest!_

Playgoers of these by-gone days will remember the name of Kate Claxton with varying degrees of pleasure. She was an actress of what was then known as the Union Square Theatre type—a type that preceded the Augustin Daly school and was strong in emotional roles. With the late Charles H. Thorne, Jr., at its head, it gave such plays as "The Banker's Daughter," "The Two Orphans," "The Celebrated Case," and "The Danicheffs," their great popular vogue. Miss Claxton was what is known as the leading juvenile lady in the Union Square Company, and her Louise, the blind sister, to Miss Sara Jewett's Henrietta in "The Two Orphans," won for her a national reputation. She was endowed by nature with a superb shock of dark red hair, over which a Titian might

have raved. This was very effective when flowing loose about the bare shoulders of the blind orphan, but afterward, when Miss Claxton went starring over the country and had the misfortune to have several narrow escapes from fire, the newspaper wits of the day could not resist the inclination to ascribe a certain incendiarism to her hair, and also to her art. And Field, who was on terms of personal friendship with Miss Claxton, led the cry with the following:

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BIOGRAPHY OF KATE CLAXTON

This famous conflagration broke out on May 3d, 1846, and has been raging with more or less violence ever since. She comes of a famous family, being a lineal descendant of the furnace mentioned in scriptural history as having been heated seven times hotter than it could be heated, in honor of the tripartite alliance of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego. One of her most illustrious ancestors performed in Rome on the occasion of the Emperor Nero's famous violin obligato, and subsequently appeared in London when a large part of that large metropolis succumbed to the fiery element. This artist is known and respected in every community where there is a fire department, and the lurid flames of her genius, the burning eloquence of her elocution, and the calorific glow of her consummate art have acquired her fame, wherever the enterprising insurance agent has penetrated. Mrs. O'Leary's cow vainly sought to rob her of much of her glory, but through the fiery ordeal of jealousy, envy, and persecution, has our heroine passed, till, from an incipient blaze, she has swelled into the most magnificent holocaust the world has ever known. And it is not alone in her profession that this gifted adustion has amazed and benefited an incinerated public: to her the world is indebted for the many fire-escapes, life-preservers, salamander safes, improved pompier ladders, play-house exits, standpipes, and Babcock extinguishers of modern times. In paying ardent homage, therefore, to this incandescent crematory this week, let us recognize her not only as the reigning queen of ignition, diathermancy, and transcalency, but also as the promoter of many of the ingenious and philanthropic boons the public now enjoys.

This was written in November, 1883, and is worthy of remark as an illustration of how in that day Field began deliberately to multiply words, each having a slight difference of meaning, as an exercise in the use of English—a practice that eventually gave him a vocabulary of almost unlimited range and marvellous accuracy.

The patience of the reader forbids that I should attempt an enumeration of all Field's friendships with stage folk, or of the unending flow of good-natured raillery and sympathetic comment that kept his favorites among them ever before the public eye. When it came Field's time, all untimely, to pay the debt we all must pay, it was left for Sir Henry Irving, the dean of the English-speaking profession, to acknowledge in a brief telegram his own and its debt to the departed poet and paragrapher in these words:

The death of Eugene Field is a loss not only to his many friends, but to the world at large. He was distinctly a man of genius, and he was dowered with a nature whose sweetness endeared him to all who knew him. To me he was a loved and honored friend, and the world seems vastly the poorer without him.

Of what singular materials and contradictory natures

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was their friendship compact. From the day Henry Irving first landed in New York until Field's pen was laid aside forever the actor's physical peculiarities and vocal idiosyncrasies were the constant theme of diverting skits and life-like vocal mimicry. Field, however, always managed to mingle his references to Mr. Irving's unmatched legs and eccentric elocution with some genuine and unexpected tribute to his personal character and histrionic genius. Nat Goodwin and Henry Dixey were the two comedians whose imitations of Mr. Irving's peculiarities of voice and manner were most widely accepted as lifelike, while intensely amusing. But neither of them could approach Field in catching the subtle inflection of Henry Irving's "Naw! Naw!" and "Ah-h! Ah-h!" with which the great actor prefixed so many of his lines. With a daring that would have been impertinent in another, Field gave imitations of Mr. Irving in Louis XI and Hamlet in his presence and to his intense enjoyment. It is a pity, however, that Sir Henry could not have been behind the screen some night at Billy Boyle's to hear Field and Dixey in a rivalry of imitations of himself in his favorite roles. Dixey was the more amusing, because he did and said things in the Irvingesque manner which the original would not have dreamed of doing, whereas Field contented himself with mimicking his voice and gesture to life.

When Irving reached Chicago, Field and I, with the connivance of Mr. Stone, lured him into a newspaper controversy over his conception and impersonation of Hamlet, which ended in an exchange of midnight suppers and won for me the sobriquet of "Slaughter Thompson" from Mistress Ellen Terry, who enjoyed the splintering of lances where all acknowledged her the queen of the lists.

I have reserved for latest mention the one actor who throughout Field's life was always dearest to his heart. Apart, they seemed singularly alike; together, the similarities of Eugene Field and Sol Smith Russell were overshadowed by their differences. There was a certain resemblance of outline in the general lines of their faces and figures. Both were clean-shaven men, with physiognomies that responded to the passing thought of each, with this difference—Field's facial muscles seemed to act in obedience to his will, while Russell's appeared to break into whimsical lines involuntarily. Russell has a smile that would win its way around the world. Field could contort his face into a thunder-cloud which could send children almost into convulsions of fear. There was one story which they both recited with invariable success, that gave their friends a great chance to compare their respective powers of facial expression. It was of a green New England farmer who visited Boston, and of course climbed up four flights of stairs to a skylight "studio" to have his "daguerotype took." After the artist had succeeded in getting his subject in as stiff and uncomfortable position as possible, after cautioning him not to move, he disappeared into his ill-smelling cabinet to prepare the plate. When this was ready he stepped airily out to the camera and bade his victim "look pleasant." Failing to get the impossible response the artist bade his sitter to smile. Then the old

farmer with a wrathful and torture-riven contortion of his mouth ejaculated, "I am smiling!"

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In rendering this, "I am smiling!" there was the misery of pent-up mental woe and physical agony in Russell's voice and face. There was something ludicrously hopeless about the attempt, as Russell's face mingled the lines of mirth and despair in a querulous grin that seemed to say, "For heaven's sake, man, don't you see that I am laughing myself to death?" Field's "I am smiling!" was almost demoniacal in its mixture of wrath, vindictiveness, and impatience. There was the snarl of a big animal about the grin with which he exposed his teeth in the mockery of mirth. His whole countenance glowered at the invisible artist in lines of suppressed rage, that seemed to bid him cut short the exposure or forfeit his life.

All Field's most successful bits of mimicry and stories were learned from Sol Smith Russell, and very many of the latter's most successful recitations were written for him by Field. They talked them over together, compared their versions and methods, and stimulated each other to fresh feats of mimicry and eccentric character delineation. Many a night, and oft after midnight, in the rotunda of the Tremont House, when John A. Rice of bibliomaniac fame, was its lessee, I was the sole paying auditor of these seances, the balance of the audience consisting of the head night clerk, night watchman, and "scrub ladies."

[Illustration: SOL SMITH RUSSELL.]

It may be recalled that Field's "Our Two Opinions" written in imitation of James Whitcomb Riley's most successful manner, was dedicated to Sol Smith Russell, and he for his part put into its recitation a subdued dramatic force and pathos that won from Henry Irving the comment that it was the greatest piece of American characterization he had ever witnessed.

Whenever Russell came to town Field spent all the time he could spare, when Russell was not acting or asleep, in his company. They exchanged all sorts of stories, but delighted chiefly in relating anecdotes of New England life and character. As Russell had for years travelled the circuit of small eastern towns, he had an exhaustless repertory of these, that smacked of salt codfish and chewing-gum, checkerberry lozenges, and that shrewd, dry Yankee wit that is equal to any situation. Between the two of them they perfected two stories that have been heard in every town in the Union where Russell has played or Field read, "The Teacher of Ettyket" and "The Old Deacon and the New Skule House." These were originally Russell's property, and he was inimitable in telling them. But having once caught Field's fancy, he proceeded to elaborate them in a way to establish at least a joint ownership in them.

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I wish I could remember the speech against the new school-house. It may be in print for ought I know, but I have never run across it. He opened with the declaration, "Fellow Citizens, I'm agin this yer new skule house." Then he went on to say that "the little old red skule house was good enuff fur them as cum afore us, it was good enuff fur us, an' I reckon its good enuff fur them as cum arter us." Before proceeding he would take a generous mouthful of loose tobacco. Next he told how he had never been to school more than a few weeks "atween seasons, and yet I reckon I kin mow my swarth with the best of them that's full of book-larnin an' all them sort of jim-cracks." Then he proceeded to illustrate the uselessness of "book-larnin" by referring to "Dan'l Webster, good likely a boy ez wus raised in these parts, what's bekum ov him? Got his head full of redin, ritin, cifern, and book-larnin. What's bekum of him, I say? Went off to Boston and I never hearn tell of him arterwards."

Russell's version of the story ended here with an emphatic declaration that the old deacon voted "No!" Field, on the contrary, when the laugh over Daniel Webster's disappearance subsided, and, seemingly as an after-thought, before taking his seat mumbled out, "By the way, I did hear somebody tell Dan'l had written a dictionary on a bridge, huh!"

Field's attentions to Russell did not end with their personal association. Week after week and month after month he sent apocryphal stories flying through the newspapers about wonderful things that never happened to Sol and his family. At one time he had Russell on the high road to a Presidential nomination on the Prohibition ticket. He solemnly recorded generous donations that Russell was (not) constantly making to philanthropic objects, with the result that the gentle comedian was pestered with applications for money for all sorts of institutions. In order to provide Russell with the means to bestow unlimited largess, Field endowed him with the touch of Midas. He would report that the matchless exponent of "Shabby Genteel" bought lead mines, to be disappointed by finding tons of virgin gold in the quartz. Like Bret Harte's hero of Downs Flat, when Russell dug for water his luck was so contrary that he struck diamonds. When he ordered oysters each half shell had its bed of pearls. One specimen will do to illustrate the character of the gifts Field bestowed on Russell "as from an exhaustless urn":

Sol Smith Russell's luck is almost as great as his art. Last week his little son Bob was digging in the back yard of the family residence in Minneapolis, and he developed a vein of coal big enough to supply the whole state of Minnesota with fuel for the next ten years. Mr. Russell was away from home at the time, but his wife (who has plenty of what the Yankees call faculty) had presence of mind not to say anything about the "Find" until, through her attorney, she had secured an option on all the real estate in the locality.

They never had any differences of opinion like "me 'nd Jim."

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*So after all it's soothin' to know
That here Sol stays 'nd yonder's Jim—
He havin' his opinyin uv Sol,
'Nd Sol havin' his opinyin uv him.*

CHAPTER XIV

BEGINNING OF HIS LITERARY EDUCATION

Before he came to Chicago, pretty much all that Eugene Field knew of literature and books had been taken in at the pores, as Joey Laddle would say, through association with lawyers, doctors, and actors. His academic education, as we have seen, was of the most cursory and intermittent nature. When he left the University of Missouri it was without a diploma, without studious habits, and without pretensions to scholarship. His trip to Europe dissipated his fortune, and his early marriage rendered it imperative that he should stop study as well as play and go to work. His father's library was safely stored in St. Louis for the convenient season that was postponed from year to year, until a score were numbered ere the nails were drawn from the precious boxes. Every cent of the salary that might have been squandered(?) in books was needed to feed and clothe the ravenous little brood that came faster than their parents "could afford," as he has told us. What time was not devoted to them and to the daily round of newspaper writing was spent in conversing with his fellows, studying life first hand, visiting theatres and enjoying himself in his own way generally. All the advance that Field had made in journalism before the year 1883 was due to native aptitude, an unfailing fund of humor and an inherited turn for literary expression. Without ever having read that author, he followed Pope's axiom that "the proper study of mankind is man." This he construed to include women and children. The latter he had every opportunity to study early and often in his own household, and most thoroughly did he avail himself thereof. As for books, his acquaintance with them for literary pleasure and uses seemed to have begun and ended with the Bible and the New England Primer. They furnished the coach that enabled his fancy "to take the air."

His knowledge of Shakespeare, so far as I could judge, had been acquired through the theatre. The unacted plays were not familiar to him. Few people realize what a person of alert intelligence and retentive memory can learn of the best English literature through the theatre-going habit. Measuring Field's opportunity by my own, during the decade from 1873 to 1883, here is a list of Shakespearian plays he could have taken in through eyes and ears without touching a book: "The Tempest," "The Merry Wives of Windsor," "Measure for Measure," "The Comedy of Errors," "Much Ado About Nothing," "A Midsummer Night's Dream," "The Merchant of Venice," "As You Like It," "The Taming of the Shrew," "Twelfth Night," "Richard II," "Richard III," "Henry IV," "Henry V," "Coriolanus," "Romeo and Juliet," "Julius Caesar," "Macbeth," "Hamlet," "King Lear," "Othello," "Antony and Cleopatra," and "Cymbeline."

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This list, embracing two-thirds of all the plays Shakespeare wrote, and practically all of his dramatic work worth knowing, covers what Field might have seen and, with a few possible exceptions, unquestionably did see, in the way calculated to give him the keenest pleasure and the most lasting impressions. These plays, during that decade, were presented by such famous actors and actresses as Edwin Booth, Lawrence Barrett, John McCullough, Barry Sullivan, George Rignold, E.L. Davenport, Ristori, Adelaide Neilson, Modjeska, Mary Anderson, Mrs. D.P. Bowers, and Rose Eytinge in the leading roles. It is impossible to overestimate the value of listening night after night to the great thoughts and subtle philosophy of the master dramatist from the lips of such interpreters, to say nothing of the daily association with the men and women who lived and moved in the atmosphere of the drama and its traditions. So, perhaps, it is only fair to include Shakespeare and the contemporaneous drama with the Bible and the New England Primer as the only staple foundations of Field's literary education when he came to Chicago. If this could have been analyzed more closely, it would have shown some traces of what was drilled into him by his old preceptor, Dr. Tufts, and many odds and ends of the recitations from the standard speaker of his elocutionary youth, but no solids either of Greek or Latin lore and not a trace of his beloved Horace.

Now it so happened that all I had ever learned in school or college of Greek and Latin had slid from me as easily as running water over a smooth stone, leaving me as innocent of the classics in the original as Field. But, unlike Field, when our fortunes threw us together, I had kept up a close and continuous reading and study of English language and literature. The early English period had always interested me, and we had not been together for two months before Field was inoculated with a ravenous taste for the English literature of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Its quaintness and the unintentional humor of its simplicity cast a spell over him, which he neither sought nor wished to escape. He began with the cycle of romances that treat of King Arthur and his knights, and followed them through their prose and metrical versions of the almost undecipherable Saxon English to the polished and perfect measure of the late English laureate. For three years Mallory's "History of King Arthur and of the Knights of the Round Table" was the delight of his poetic soul and the text-book for his conversation and letters, and its effect was traceable in almost every line of his newspaper work. Knights, damosells, paynims, quests, jousts, and tourneys, went "rasing and trasing" through his manuscript, until some people thought he was possessed with an archaic humor from which he would never recover.

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But Sir Thomas Mallory was not his only diet at this time. He discovered that the old-book corner of A.C. McClurg & Co.'s book-store was a veritable mine of old British ballads, and he began sipping at that spring which in a few years was to exercise such a potent influence on his own verse. It was from this source that he learned the power of simple words and thoughts, when wedded to rhyme, to reach the human heart. His "Little Book of Western Verse" would never have possessed its popular charm had not its author taken his cue from the "Grand Old Masters." He caught his inspiration and faultless touch from studying the construction and the purpose of the early ballads and songs, illustrative of the history, traditions, and customs of the knights and peasantry of England. Where others were content to judge of these in such famous specimens as "Chevy Chase" and "The Nut Brown Maid," Field delved for the true gold in the neglected pages of Anglo-Saxon chronicle and song. He did not waste much time on the unhealthy productions of the courtiers of the time of Queen Elizabeth, but chose the ruder songs of the bards, whose hearts were pure even if their thoughts were sometimes crude, their speech blunt, and their metre queer. Who cannot find suggestions for a dozen of Field's poems in this single stanza from "Lady Anne Bothwell's Lament":

*Balow, my babe, lye still and sleipe!
It grieves me sair to see thee weipe:
If thoust be silent lse be glad,
Thy maining maks my heart ful sad.
Balow, my boy, thy mother's joy,
Thy father breides me great annoy.
Balow, my babe, ly still and sleipe,
It grieves me sair, to see thee weipe.*

Or where could writer go to a better source for inspiration than to ballads preserving in homely setting such gems as this, from "Bartham's Dirge":

*They buried him at mirk midnight,
When the dew fell cold and still,
When the aspin gray forgot to play,
And the mist clung to the hill.*

When you have mingled the simple, bald, and often beautiful pathos of this old balladry with the fancies of fairy-land which Field invented, or borrowed from Hans Andersen's tales, you have the key to much of the best poetry and prose he ever wrote. The secret of his undying attachment to Bohn's Standard Library was that therein he found almost every book that introduced him to the masters of the kind of English literature that most appealed to him. Here he unearthed the best of the ancients in literal English garb, from AEschylus to Xenophon, to say nothing of a dictionary of Latin and of Greek quotations done into English with an index verborum. More to the purpose still, Bohn put into his hands Smart's translation of Horace, "carefully revised by an Oxonian." In

the cheap, uniform green cloth of Bohn, he fell in with Percy's "Reliques of Ancient English," Bell's "Ballads and Songs of the Peasantry of England," Bede's "Ecclesiastical History," Marco Polo's "Travels," Keightly's "Fairy Mythology," and renewed his acquaintance with Andersen's "Danish Legends and Fairy Tales," and Grimm's "Fairy Tales," and last, but not least, with one of the best editions of Isaac Walton's "Complete Angler," wherein he did some of his best fishing.

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It has been a common impression that Field was attracted to the old-book corner of McClurg's store by the old and rare books displayed there. These were not for him, as he had not then learned that bibliomania could be made to put money in his purse or to wing his shafts of irony with feathers from its favorite nest. He went to browse among the dark green covers of Bohn and remained years after to prey upon the dry husks of the bibliomaniacs.

Among the cherished relics of those days there lies before me as I write "The Book of British Ballads," edited by S.C. Hall, inscribed on the title page:

"Forsan et haec olim meminisse juvabit."

To Slason Thompson from Eugene Field. Christmas, 1885.

This volume Field had picked up in some secondhand book-store for a quarter or a dime. He had erased the pencilled name of the original owner on the fly-leaf and had written mine and the date over it in ink. Then turning to the inside of the back cover he had rubbed out the price mark and ostentatiously scrawled "\$2.50." This "doctoring" of price marks was a favorite practice of Field's, perfectly understood among his friends as a token of affectionate humor and never dreamed of as an attempt at deception. By such means he added zest to the exchange of those mementoes of friendship, which were never forgotten as Christmas-tide rolled round, to the end of the chapter. The day has indeed come when it is "a pleasure to remember these things."

The Latin motto on this particular copy of ballads reminds me, among other pleasant memories, that during the year 1885 there came into Field's life and mine an intimate friendship that was to exercise a more potent influence on Field's literary bent than anything in his experience. I have before me the following description of "The Frocked Host of Watergrasshill":

Prout had seen much of mankind, and, in his deportment through life, showed that he was well versed in all those varied arts of easy, but still gradual, acquirement which singularly embellished the intercourse of society: these were the results of his excellent continental education—

[Greek] Pollon d' anthropn idon astea, kai noon egno.

But at the head of his own festive board he particularly shone; for, though in ministerial functions he was exemplary and admirable, ever meek and unaffected at the altar of his rustic chapel, where

"His looks adorned the venerable place,"

still, surrounded by a few choice friends, the calibre of whose genius was in unison with his own, with a bottle of his choice old claret before him, he was truly a paragon.

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Substitute a physician for the priest; change the scene from the neighborhood of the Blarney stone to a basement chop and oyster house in Chicago; instead of a continental education give him an American experience as a surgeon in the Civil War, in the hospitals of Cincinnati, and on the yellow fever commission that visited Memphis in 1867, and you have the Dr. Frank W. Reilly, to whom Field owed more than to all the schools, colleges, and educational agencies through which he had flitted from his youth up. When I first knew Dr. Reilly he was Secretary of the Illinois State Board of Health, located at Springfield, and an occasional correspondent of the Chicago Herald. The State of Illinois owes to him its gradual rescue from a dangerous laxity in the matter of granting medical licenses, until to-day the requirements necessary to practise his profession in this state compare favorably with those of any other state of the Union. Shortly after I went from the Herald to the News, as related in a previous chapter, Dr. Reilly changed his correspondence to the latter paper. In 1885 he resigned his position on the State Board of Health, and, coming to Chicago, formed an editorial connection with the News that continued until he was appointed Deputy Commissioner of Health for Chicago. In this last position, which he occupies to-day, I do not hesitate to say that he has done more to promote its health, cleanliness, and consequent happiness, than any other single citizen of Chicago. If the sanitary canal was not his child, it was pushed to completion through the fostering hand of his adoption. The Lincoln Park Sanitarium for poor children, and other similar agencies exploited by the Daily News, were born of his suggestions and were nurtured by his personal supervision. It is impossible, and would be out of place here, to specify what Dr. Reilly has done for the sanitation of Chicago as Chief Deputy in the Health Office. Administrations may come and go. Would that he could sip the elixir of life, that he might go on forever!

[Illustration: DR. FRANK W. REILLY.]

On his occasional visits to Chicago, before he came up here for good, Dr. Reilly had become a welcome guest and sometimes host in our midnight round-ups at the Boston Oyster House, and when he made his home here he was taken into regular fellowship. The regulars then were Field, Ballantyne, Reilly, and I—with Mr. Stone, Willis Hawkins, a special writer on the News, Morgan Bates, Paul Hull, a sketch writer who fancied he looked like Lincoln and told stories that would have made Lincoln blush to own a faint resemblance, and Cowen when in town, to say nothing of “visiting statesmen” and play-actors as occasional visitors and contributors to the score. Some insight into the characters of the four regulars may be gained from the statement that Field invariably ordered coffee and apple pie, Ballantyne tea and toast with oysters, Dr. Reilly oysters and claret, and I steak and Bass’s ale.

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It was during these meetings that Field caught from Dr. Reilly's frequent unctuous quotations his first real taste for Horace. To two works the doctor was impartially devoted, the "Noetes Ambrosianae" and "The Reliques of Father Prout."

He never wearied of communion with the classical father or of literary companionship with Christopher North, Timothy Tickler, and the Ettrick Shepherd. We never sat down to pie or oysters that his imagination did not transform that Chicago oyster house into Ambrose's Tavern, the scene of the feasts and festivities of table and conversation of the immortal trio. But though the doctor enjoyed association with Kit North and the voluble Shepherd, it was for the garrulous Father Prout, steeped in the gossip and learning of the ancients, that he reserved his warmest love and veneration. So saturated and infatuated was the doctor with this fascinating creation of Francis Mahony's, that he inoculated Field with his devotion, and before we knew it the author of the Denver Tribune Primer stories was suffering from a literary disease, to the intoxicating pleasure of which he yielded himself without reservation.

To those who wish to understand the effect of this inspiration upon the life and writings of Eugene Field, but who have not enjoyed familiar acquaintance with the celebrated Prout papers, some description of this work of Francis Mahony may not be amiss. He was a Roman Catholic priest, educated at a Jesuit college at Amiens, who had lived and held positions in France, Switzerland, and Ireland. It was while officiating at the chapel of the Bavarian Legation in London that he began contributing the Prout papers to Fraser's Magazine. These consisted of fanciful narratives, each serving as a vehicle for the display of his wonderful polyglot learning, and containing translations of well-known English songs into Latin, Greek, French, and Italian verse, which later he seriously represented as the true originals from which the English authors had boldly plagiarized. He also introduced into his stories the songs of France and Italy and felicitous translations, none of which were better than those from Horace. His command of the various languages into which he rendered English verse was extraordinary, and his translations were so free and spirited in thought and diction as to excite the admiration of the best scholars. When it is said that his translations of French and Latin odes preserved their poetical expression and sentiments with the freedom of original composition almost unequalled in English translations, the exceptional character of Father Prout's work will be appreciated. Accompanying these English versions there was a running commentary of semi-grave, but always humorous, criticism. Of Francis Mahony's acknowledged poems, the "Bells of Shandon" is the best known. In the Prout papers, while his genius finds its chief expression in fantastic invention and sarcastic and cynical wit, it is everywhere sweetened by gentle sentiments and an unflinching fund of human nature and kindly humor.

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"Prout's translations from Horace are too free and easy," solemnly said the London Athenaeum, reviewing them as they came out more than sixty years ago. And no wonder, for Prout invented Horatian odes that he might translate them into such rollicking stanzas as Burns's "Green Grow the Rashes, O!"

That Field, at the time of which I am writing (1885), had quite an idea of following in the wake of Father Prout may be indicated by the following Latin jingle written in honor of his friend, Morgan Bates, who, with Elwin Barron, had written a play of western life entitled "The Mountain Pink." It was described as a "moral crime," and had been successfully staged in Chicago.

MAECENAS

Mons! aliusque cum nobis,
Illicet tibi feratum,
Quid, ejusmodi hoec vobis,
Hunc aliquando erratum

Esse futurus fuisse,
Melior optimus vates?
Quamquam amo amavisse—
Bonum ad Barron et Bates!

Gloria, Mons! sempiternus,
Jupiter, Pluvius, Juno,
Itur ad astra diurnus,
Omnes *et ceteras* uno!

Fratres! cum bibite vino,
Moralis, criminis fates,
Montem hic vita damfino—
Hic vita ad Barron et Bates._

A very slight knowledge of Latin verse is needed to detect that this has no pretence to Latin composition such as Father Mahony's scholarship caracoled in, but is merely English masquerading in classical garb.

Father Prout also introduced Field to fellowship with Beranger, the national song writer of France, to whom, next to the early English balladists and Horace, he owes so much of that clear, simple, sparkling style that has given his writings enduring value. Beranger's description of himself might, with some modifications, be fitted to Field: "I am a good little bit of a poet, clever in the craft, and a conscientious worker, to whom old airs have brought some success." Beranger chose to sing for the people of France,

Field for the children of the world. Field caught his fervor for Beranger from the enthusiasm of Prout.

“I cannot for a moment longer,” wrote he, “repress my enthusiastic admiration for one who has arisen in our days to strike in France with a master hand the lyre of the troubadour and to fling into the shade all the triumphs of bygone minstrelsy. Need I designate Beranger, who has created for himself a style of transcendent vigor and originality, and who has sung of *war, love, and wine*, in strains far excelling those of Blondel, Tyrtaeus, Pindar, and the Teian bard. He is now the genuine representative of Gallic poesy in her convivial, her amatory, her warlike and her philosophic mood; and the plenitude of the inspiration that dwelt successively in the souls of all the songsters of ancient France seems to have transmigrated into Beranger and found a fit recipient in his capacious and liberal mind.”

That Field caught the inspiration of Beranger more truly than Father Prout, those who question can judge for themselves by a comparison of their respective versions of “Le Violon Brise”—the broken fiddle. A stanza by each must suffice to show the difference:



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BERANGER

*Viens, mon chien! Viens, ma pauvre bete!
Mange, malgre, mon desespoir.
Il me reste un gateau de fete—
Demain nous aurons du pain noir!*

PROUT

*My poor dog! here! of yesterday's festival-cake
Eat the poor remains in sorrow;
For when next a repast you and I shall make,
It must be on brown bread, which, for charity's sake,
Your master must beg or borrow.*

FIELD

*There, there, poor dog, my faithful friend,
Pay you no heed unto my sorrow:
But feast to-day while yet we may,—
Who knows but we shall starve to-morrow!*

The credit for verbal literalness of translation is with Prout, but the spirit of the fiddler of Beranger glows through the free rendition of Field.

[Illustration: "FATHER PROUT." *Francis Mahony.*]

The reader of Eugene Field's works will find scant acknowledgment of his indebtedness to Father Francis Mahony, but there are many expressions of his love and admiration for the friend who introduced him to the scholar, wit, and philosopher, by whose ways of life and work his own were to be so shaped and tinged. Among these my scrap-books afford three bits of verse which indicate in different degrees the esteem in which "the genial dock" of our comradeship was held by his associates as well as by Field. The first was written in honor of the doctor's silver wedding:

TO DR. FRANK W. REILLY

If I were rich enough to buy
A case of wine (though I abhor it!)
I'd send a case of extra dry,
And willingly get trusted for it.
But, lack a day! you know that I'm
As poor as Job's historic turkey—
In lieu of Mumm, accept this rhyme,
An honest gift, though somewhat jerky.



This is your silver-wedding day—
You didn't mean to let me know it!
And yet your smiles and raiment gay
Beyond all peradventure show it!
By all you say and do it's clear
A birdling in your breast is singing,
And everywhere you go you hear
The old-time bridal bells a-ringing.

All, well, God grant that these dear chimes
May mind you of the sweetness only
Of those far-distant callow times
When you were bachelor and lonely—
And when an angel blessed your lot—
For angel is your helpmate, truly—
And when to share the joy she brought,
Came other little angels duly.

So here's a health to you and wife:
Long may you mock the reaper's warning,
And may the evening of your life
In rising Sons renew the morning;
May happiness and peace and love
Come with each morrow to caress ye;
And when you've done with earth, above—
God bless ye, dear old friend—God bless ye!_

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The second is of a very different flavor and shows Field indulging in that play of personal persiflage, in which he took a never-flagging pleasure. It has no title and was written in pencil on two sheets of rough brown paper:

The Dock he is a genial friend, He frequently has cash to lend; He writes for Rauch, and on the pay He sets 'em up three times a day. Oh, how serenely I would mock My creditors, if I were Dock.

The Cowen is a lusty lad
For whom the women-folks go mad;
He has a girl in every block—
Herein, methinks, he beats the Dock—
Yes, if the choice were left to me
A lusty Cowen I would be.

Yet were I Cowen, where, oh, where
Would be my Julia, plump and fair?
And where would be those children four
Which now I smilingly adore?
The thought induces such a shock,
I'd not be Cowen—I'd be Dock!

But were I Dock, with stores of gold,
How would I pine at being old—
How grieve to see in Cowen's eyes
That amorous fire which age denies—
Oh, no, I'd not be Dock forsooth,
I'd rather be the lusty youth.

Nor Dock, nor Cowen would I be,
But such as God hath fashioned me;
For I may now with maidens fair
Assume I'm Cowen debonnair,
Or, splurging on a borrowed stock,
I can imagine I'm the Dock._

The last tribute which I quote from Field to his school-master, literary guide, and friend is credited to the "Wit of the Silurian Age," and is accompanied by a drawing by the poet, who took a cut from some weekly of the day and touched it up with black, red, and green ink to represent the genial "Dock" seated in an arm-chair before a cheery fire, with the inevitable claret bottle on a stand within easy reach and a glass poised in his hand ready for the sip of a connoisseur, while the devotee of Kit North and Father Prout beamed graciously at you through his glasses:



*Said Field to Dr. Reilly, "You
Are like the moon, for you get brighter
When you get full, and it is true
Your heavy woes thereby grow lighter."*

"And you" the Doctor answer made,
"Are like, the moon because you borrow
The capital on which you trade—
As I'm acquainted, to my sorrow!"

"'Tis true I'm like the moon, I know,"
Replied the poor but honest wight,
"For, journeying through this vale of woe,
I borrow oft, but always light!" _

But Field's acknowledgments of an ever-increasing debt of gratitude to Dr. Reilly were not confined to privately circulated tokens of affection and friendship, as the following stanzas, printed in his column in the News, in February, 1889, testify:

TO F.W.R. AT 6 P.M.

My friend, Maecenas and physician,
Is in so grumpy a condition
I really more than half suspicion
He nears his end;
Who then would lie on earth to shave me,
To feed me, coach me, and to save me
From tedious cares that would enslave me—
Without this friend?

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Nay, fate forbend such wild disaster!
May I play Pollux to his Castor
Thro' years that bind our hearts the faster
With golden tether;
And every morbid fear releasing,
May our affection bide unceasing—
every salary raise increasing—
Then die together!_

Finally, Dr. Reilly is the Dr. O'Rell of "The Love Affairs of a Bibliomaniac," whom Field playfully credits with prescribing one or the other—the Noctes or the Reliques—to his patients, no matter what disease they might be afflicted with. He prescribed them to both of us, and Field took to his bed with the Reliques and did not get up until he had "comprehended" the greater part of its five hundred and odd pages of perennial literary stimulant.

CHAPTER XV

METHOD OF WORK

Although Eugene Field was the most unconventional of writers, there was a method in all his ways that made play of much of his work. No greater mistake was ever made than in attributing his physical break-down to exhaustion from his daily grind in a newspaper office. No man ever made less of a grind than he in preparing copy for the printer. He seldom arrived at the office before eleven o'clock and never settled down to work before three o'clock. The interim was spent in puttering over the exchanges, gossiping with visitors, of whom he had a constant stream, quizzing every other member of the staff, meddling here, chaffing there, and playing hob generally with the orderly routine of affairs. He was a persistent, insistent, irrepressible disturber of everything but the good-fellowship of the office, to which he was the chief contributor. No interruption from Field ever came or was taken amiss. From the hour he ambled laboriously up the steep and narrow stairs, anathematizing them at every step, in every tone of mockery and indignation, to the moment he sat down to his daily column of "leaded agate, first line brevier," no man among us knew what piece of fooling he would be up to next.

Something was wrong, Field was out of town, or some old crony from Kansas City, St. Louis, or Denver was in Chicago, if about one o'clock I was not interrupted by a summons from him that the hour for luncheon had arrived. Although I was at work within sound of his voice, these came nearly always in the form of a note, delivered with an unvarying grin by the office-boy, who would drop any other errand, however pressing, to do Field's antic bidding. These notes were generally flung into the waste-paper basket, much to my present regret, for of themselves they would have made a

most remarkable exhibit. Sometimes the summons would be in the form of a bar of music like this which I preserved:

[Illustration: A BAR OF MUSIC. *Written by Eugene Field.*]

But more often it was a note in the old English manner, which for years was affected between us, like this one:

PUISSANT AND TRIUMPHANT LORD:

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By my halidom it doth mind me to hold discourse with thee. Come thou privily to my castle beyond the moat, an' thou wilt.

In all fealty, my liege,
Thy gentle vassal,

[Illustration: The mark of The Good Knight.]

Or, going down to the counting-room, he would summon a messenger to mount the stairs with a formal invitation like this:

SIR SLOSSON:

The Good but Impecunious Knight bides in the business office, and there soothly will he tarry till you come anon. So speed thee, bearing with thee ducats that in thy sweet company and by thy joyous courtesy the Good Knight may be regaled with great and sumptuous cheer withal.

THE GOOD KNIGHT.

Then out we would sally to the German restaurant around the corner, where the coffee was good, the sandwiches generous, and the pie execrable. If there was a German cook in Chicago who could make good pies we never had the good fortune to find him.

[Illustration: TWO GOOD KNIGHTS AT FEAST
drawing and legend:

With great and sumptous cheer and with
Joyous discourse, the good knight
Slosson regaleth the good knight
Eugene sans peur et sans monie.
From a drawing by Eugene Field.]

Having regaled ourselves with this sumptuous cheer to "repletion," we would walk three blocks to McClurg's book-store and replenish our stock of English, sacred and profane, defiled and undefiled. I am writing now of the days before Field made the old-book department famous throughout the country as the browsing ground of the bibliomaniacs. After loitering there long enough to digest our lunches and to nibble a little literature, we would retrace our steps to the office, where Field resumed his predatory actions until he was ready to go to work. Then peace settled on the establishment for about three hours. If any noisy visitor or obstreperous reporter in the local room did anything to disturb the "literary atmosphere" that brooded around the office, Field would bang on the tin gong hanging over his desk until all other noises sank into dismayed silence. Then he would resume "sawing wood" for his "Sharps and Flats."



If Field had not quite worked off his surplus stock of horse-play on his associates, he would vent it upon the compositor in some such apostrophe as the following:

*By my troth, I'll now begin ter
Cut a literary caper
On this pretty tab of paper
For the horney-handed printer;
I expect to hear him swearing
That these inks are very wearing
On his ocular squinter.*

Or this:

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We desire to announce that Mademoiselle Rhea, the gifted Flanders maid, who has the finest wardrobe on the stage, will play a season of bad brogue and flash dresses in this city very soon. This announcement, however, will never see the dawn of November 13th, and we kiss it a fond farewell as we cheerfully submit it as a sop to Cerberus.

Field had a theory that Ballantyne, the managing editor, would not consider that he was earning his salary, and that Mr. Stone would not think that he was exercising the full authority of editorship, unless something in his column was sacrificed to the blue pencil of a watchful censorship. Coupled with this was the more or less cunning belief that it was good tactics to write one or two outrageously unprintable paragraphs to draw the fire, so to speak, of the blue pencil, and so to divert attention from something, about which there might be question, which he particularly wished to have printed. Ballantyne, as I have said, was a very much more exacting censor than Stone, for the reason that the humor of a story or paragraph often missed his Scotch literalness, while Stone never failed to let anything pass on that score.

By six o'clock Field's writing for the day was done, and he generally went home for dinner. But that this was not always the case the following notes testify:

GOOD AND GENTLE KNIGHT:

If so be ye pine and so hanker after me this night I pray you come anon to the secret lair near the moat on the next floor, and there you will eke descry me. There we will discourse on love and other joyous matters, and until then I shall be, as I have ever been,

Your most courteous friend,

E. FIELD.

* * * * *

An' it please the good and gentle knight, Sir Slosson Thompson, his friend in very sooth, the honest knight will arrive at his castle this day at the 8th hour, being minded to partake of Sir Slosson's cheer and regale him with the wealth of his joyous discourse.

THE GOOD KNIGHT.

Five nights out of the week Field spent some part of the evening at one of the principal theatres of the town, of which at that time there were five. He was generally accompanied by Mrs. Field and her sister, Miss Comstock, who subsequently became Mrs. Ballantyne. When it was a family party, Ballantyne and I would join it about the last act, and there was invariably a late supper party, which broke up only in time for the last north-bound car. When Field was a self-invited guest with any of his intimates at dinner the party would adjourn for a round of the theatres, ending at that one where the star or

leading actor was most likely to join in a symposium of steak and story at Billy Boyle's English chop-house. This resort, on Calhoun Place, between Dearborn and Clark Streets, was for many years the most famous all-night eating-house in Chicago. For chops and steaks it had not its equal in America, possibly not in the world. Long after we had ceased to frequent Boyle's, so long that our patronage could not have been charged with any share in the catastrophe, it went into the hands of the sheriff. This afforded Field an opportunity to write the following sympathetic and serio-whimsical reminiscence of a unique institution in Chicago life:

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It is unpleasant and it is hard to think of Billy Boyle's chop-house as a thing of the past, for that resort has become so closely identified with certain classes and with certain phases of life in Chicago that it seems it must necessarily keep right on forever in its delectable career. We much prefer to regard its troubles as temporary, and to believe that presently its hospitable doors will be thrown open again to the same hungry, appreciative patrons who for so many years have partaken of its cheer. When the sheriff asked Billy Boyle the other day where the key to the door was, Billy seemed to feel hurt. What did Billy know about a key, and what use had he ever found for one in that hospitable spot, whither famished folk of every class gravitated naturally for the flying succor of Billy's larder?

"The door never had a key," said Billy. "Only once in all the time I have been here has the place been closed, and then it was but four hours."

Down in New Orleans there is a famous old saloon called the Sazeraz. For fifty-four years it stood open to the thirsty public. Then the City Council passed a Sunday-closing ordinance, and with the enforcement of this law came the discovery that through innocuous desuetude the hinges of the doors to the Sazeraz had rusted off, while the doors themselves had become so worm-eaten that they had to be replaced by new ones. The sheriff who pounced down on Billy Boyle's in his official capacity must have fancied he had struck a second Sazeraz, for the lock upon the door was so rusty and rheumatic through disuse that it absolutely refused to respond to the persuasion of the keys produced for the performance of its functions. We cannot help applauding the steadfastness with which this lock resented the indignity which the official visit of the sheriff implied. If we were to attempt to make a roster of the names of those who have made the old chop-house their Mecca in seasons of hunger and thirst, we could easily fill a page. So, although you may have never visited the place yourself, it is easy for you to understand that many are the associations and reminiscences which attached to it. There was never any attempt at style there; the rooms were unattractive, save for the savory odors which hung about them; the floors were bare, and the furniture was severe to the degree of rudeness. There was no china in use upon the premises; crockery was good enough; men came there to feed their stomachs, not their eyes. Boyle's was a resort for politicians, journalists, artists, actors, musicians, merchants, gamblers, professional men generally, and sporting men specially. Boyle himself has always been a lover of the horse and a patron of the turf; naturally, therefore, his restaurant became the rendezvous of horsemen, so called. Upon the walls there were colored prints, which confirmed any suspicion

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which a stranger might have of the general character of the place, and the *mise en scene* differed in no essential feature from that presented in the typical chop-house one meets in the narrow streets and by-ways of "dear ol' Lunnon!" It is likely that Boyle's has played in its quiet way a more important part in the history of the town than you might suppose. It was here that the lawyers consulted with their clients during the noon luncheon hour; politicians came thither to confer one another and to devise those schemes by which parties were to be humbugged. It was here that the painter and the actor discussed their respective arts; here, too, in the small hours of morning, the newspaper editor and reporters gathered together to dismiss professional cares and jealousies for the nonce, and to feed in the most amicable spirit from the same trough. Jobs were put up, *coups* planned, reconciliations effected, schemes devised, combinations suggested, news exploited and scandals disseminated, friendships strengthened, acquaintances made—all this at Billy Boyle's—so you see it would have been hard to find a better field in which to study human nature, for hither came people of every class and kind with their ambitions, hopes, purposes, and eccentricities. The glory of the house of Boyle was the quality of viands served there, and nowhere else in the world was it possible to find finer steaks and chops. These substantials were served with a liberality that would surely have astounded those who did not understand that the patrons of Billy Boyle's were men blest with long appetites and robust digestions. Spanish stew was one of the specialties; so were baked potatoes, and so were Spanish roasted onions. It was the custom to sit and smoke after the meal had been disposed of, and the quality of the cigars sold in the place was the best; at night particularly—say after the newspaper clans began to gather—Boyle's wore the aspect of a smoke-talk in full blast. Harmony invariably prevailed. If, perchance, any discordant note was sounded it was speedily hushed. Charlie, the man behind the bar, had a way of his own of preserving the peace. He was a gentleman of a few words, slow to anger, but sure of wrath. Experience had taught him that the best persuasive to respectful and reverential order was a spoke of a wagon-wheel. One of these weapons lay within reach, and it never failed to restore tranquillity when produced and wielded at the proper moment by Charlie. The consequence was that Charlie inspired all good men with respect and all evil men with terror, and the result was harmony of the most enjoyable character. Perhaps if Charlie had been on watch when that horrid sheriff arrived on his meddlesome errand, Billy Boyle's might still be open to the rich and the poor who now meet together in that historic alley and bemoan the passing of their old point of rendezvous. Perhaps—but why indulge in surmises?

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It is pleasanter to regard this whole disagreeable sheriff business as an episode that is soon to pass away and to be forgotten, if not forgiven. Surely the clouds will roll by; surely you, Septimius, and you, Tuliarchus mine, will presently gather with others of the old cronies around the hospitable board of that genial host to renew once more the delights of days and nights endeared to us in memory! Billy Boyle's succumbed to his love for the race-track and the abuse of his credit-check system. Field has mentioned gamblers as among the patrons of the place. After midnight they were his most liberal customers. Winning or losing, their appetites were always on edge and their tastes epicurean. Nothing the house could afford was too good for them, and, while Charlie was on deck, what the house could afford was good enough for them, whether they thought so or not. During the '80s Chicago was a gamblers' paradise. Everything was run "wide open," as the saying is, under police regulation and protection, and Billy Boyle's was in the very centre of the gambling district. If Billy had been paid cash, and could have been kept away from the race-tracks, he would have grown rich beyond the terrors of the sheriff. While the gamblers were winning they supped like princes and paid like goldsmiths. When they were losing their losses whetted their appetites, they ate to keep their spirits up, and Billy's spindles were not long enough to hold their waiters' checks. In flush times a goodly percentage of these checks were redeemed, but the reckoning of the bad ones at the bottom grew longer and dirtier and more hopeless, until it brought the sheriff. We of the Morning News—Field, Stone, Ballantyne, Reilly, and I—frequented Boyle's until the war which the paper waged unceasingly upon the league between the city administration and the gamblers brought about a stricter surveillance of gaming, and we came to be regarded by our fellow-guests as interlopers, if not spies, upon their goings in and out. Neither Boyle nor the ever faithful Charlie ever by word or sign intimated that we were *personae non gratae*, but the atmosphere of the place became too chilly for the enjoyment of late suppers.

I have devoted so much space to Billy Boyle's because for several years Field found there the best opportunity of his life "to study human nature" and observe the "ambitions, hopes, purposes, and eccentricities" of his fellow-man.

After the "pernicious activity" of our newspaper work had "put the shutters up" against us in Calhoun Place, we transferred our midnight custom to the Boston Oyster House, on the corner of Clark and Madison streets, which Field selected because of the suggestion of baked beans, brown bread, and codfish in its name. Here we were assigned a special table in the corner near the grill range, and here we were welcomed along about twelve o'clock

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by the cheerful chirping of a cricket in the chimney, which Field had a superstition was intended solely for him. The Boston Oyster House had the advantage over Billy Boyle's that here we could bring "our women folks" after the theatre or concert. It was through a piece of doggerel, composed and recited by Field with great gusto on one of these occasions, that we first learned of the serious attentions of our managing editor to Mrs. Field's youngest sister. One of these stanzas ran thus:

*A quart taken out of the ice-box,
A dozen broiled over the fire,
Then home from the show
With her long-legged beau,
What more can our sister desire?*

But the ladies were never invited to invade the cricket's corner, where we were permitted to beguile the hours in gossip, song, and story until the scrub-women had cleaned the rest of the big basement and "the first low swash" of the suds and brush threatened the legs of our chairs. Then, with a parting anathema on the business of slaves that toiled when honest folk should be abed, we would ascend the stairs and betake ourselves to our several homes. It was at the Boston that Field varied his diet of pie and coffee with what he was pleased to describe as "the staying qualities as well as the pleasing aspect of a Welsh rabbit."

During the first years of his connection with the Morning News, Field worked without intermission six days of the week, without a vacation and, except when he transferred his scene of operations to the capitol at Springfield, without leaving Chicago—with two noteworthy exceptions. For some reason Field had taken what the Scotch call a scunner to ex-President Hayes, whom he regarded as a political Pecksniff. The refusal of Mr. Hayes while President to serve wine in the White House Field regarded as a cheap affectation, and so when, through his numerous sources of information, he learned that Mr. Hayes derived a part of his income from saloon property in Omaha, nothing would do Field but, accompanied by the staff artist, he must go to Omaha and investigate himself the story for the News.

He went, found the facts were as represented, and returned with the proofs and a photograph of himself sitting on a beer-keg in a saloon owned by Rutherford B. Hayes. He also bought the keg, and out of its staves had a frame made for the picture, which he presented to Mr. Ballantyne.

His other notable absence from Chicago in those days was also connected with ex-President Hayes. This time it involved a visit to the latter's home at Fremont, O. In all his frequent references to Mr. Hayes, Field had always spoken of Mrs. Hayes with sincere admiration for her womanly qualities and convictions. So long as these were

confined to the ordering of her personal household he deemed them as sacred as they were admirable. Nor did he blame her for attempting to extend them to rule the actions of her husband in his public relations. But it was for

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permitting this that Mr. Hayes earned the scorn of Field. When President Hayes retired from the White House to Fremont, instead of becoming another Cincinnatus at the plough he was overshadowed by the stories of Mrs. Hayes's devotion to her chicken-farm, and the incongruity of the occupation appealed so strongly to Field's sense of the ridiculous that he prevailed on Mr. Stone to let him go down to Fremont to take in its full absurdity with his own eyes.

Before going to Omaha, Field had taken the precaution to write enough "Sharps and Flats" to fill his column until he returned—a precaution he omitted when he started for Fremont, on the understanding that his associates on the editorial page would do his work for him. This was our opportunity, and gladly we availed ourselves of it. The habit had grown on Field of introducing his paragraphic skits with such "country journalisms" as:

"We opine,"

"Anent the story,"

"We are free to admit,"

"We violate no confidence,"

"It is stated, though not authoritatively,"

"Our versatile friend,"

"We learn from a responsible source," and

"Our distinguished fellow-townsmen."

This he accompanied with a lavish bestowal of titles that would have done credit to the most courtly days of southern chivalry.

So when Field was safely off for Fremont we started to produce a column that would be a travesty on his favorite expressions at the expense of his titled friends. We opined and violated all the confidences of which we were possessed in regard to Colonel Phocion Howard, of the Batavia frog-farm, Major Moses P. Handy, the flaming sword of the Philadelphia Press, Senator G. Frisbie Hoar, Major Charles Hasbrook, Colonel William E. Curtis, Colonel John A. Joyce, Colonel Fred W. Nye, Major E. Clarence Stedman, and Colonels Dana, Watterson, and Halstead, and we exhausted the flowers of Field's vocabulary in daring encomiums on Madame Modjeska, Lotta, Minnie Maddern, and Marie Jansen. If any of Field's particular friends were omitted from "favorable mention" in that column, it was because we forgot or Mr. Stone's blue pencil

came to the rescue of his absent friend. Ballantyne was party to the conspiracy, because he had often remonstrated against the rut of expression into which Field was in danger of falling.

When Field returned that one column had driven all thoughts of Mrs. Hayes's hens from his thoughts. There was a cold glitter in his pale blue eyes and a hollow mock in the forced "ha, ha" with which he greeted some of our "alleged efforts at wit." He said little, but a few days later relieved his pent-up feelings by printing the following:

MAY THE 26th, 1885

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As when the bright, the ever-glorious sun
In eastern slopes lifts up his flaming head,
And sees the harm the envious night has done
While he, the solar orb, has been abed—
Sees here a yawl wrecked on the slushy sea,
Or there a chestnut from its roost blown down,
Or last year's birds' nests scattered on the lea,
Or some stale scandal rampant in the town—
Sees everywhere the petty work of night,
Of sneaking winds and cunning, coward rats,
Of hooting owls, of bugaboo and sprite,
Of roaches, wolves, and serenading cats—

Beholds and smiles that bagatelles so small
Should seek to devastate the slumbering earth—
Then smiling still he pours on one and all
The warmth and sunshine of his grateful mirth;
So he who rules in humor's vast domain,
Borne far away by some Ohio train,
Returns again, like some recurring sun,
And shining, God-like, on the furrowed plain
Repairs the ills that envious hands have done._

But the daring violation of Field's confidence effected its purpose. Never again did he employ the type-worn expressions of country journalism, except with set preface and self-evident satire. He shunned them as he did an English solecism, which he never committed, save as a decoy to draw the fire of the ever-watchful and hopeless grammatical purist.

CHAPTER XVI

NATURE OF HIS DAILY WORK

In the last chapter I have told in general terms how Field employed himself day by day, from which the reader may form the impression that between eleven A.M. and midnight not over one-quarter of his time was actually employed in work, the balance being frittered away in seeming play. In one sense the reader would be right in such an inference. Field worked harder and longer at his play than at what the world has been pleased to accept as the work of a master workman, but out of that play was born the best of all that he has left. His daily column was a crystallization of the busy fancies that were running through his head during all his hours of fooling and nights of light-hearted pleasure. It reflected everything he read and heard and saw. It was a "barren sea from which he made a dry haul"—a dreary and colorless gathering that left him without

material for his pen. He did not hunt for this material with a brass band, but went for it with studied persistence. Field never believed that he was sent into the world to reform it. His aim was to amuse himself, and if in so doing he entertained or gratified others, so much the better. "Reform away," he was once reported as saying, "reform away, but as for me, the world is good enough for me as it is. I am a thorough optimist. In temperament I'm a little like old Horace—I want to get all the happiness out of the world that's possible." And he got it, not intermittently and in chunks, but day by day and every hour of the day.

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His brother Roswell has said that the “curse of comedy was on Eugene,” and “it was not until he threw off that yoke and gave expression to the better and sweeter thoughts within him that, as with Bion, the voice of song flowed freely from the heart.”

I do not think it is quite fair to regard comedy as a curse or a yoke. Certainly Eugene Field never suffered under the blight of the one nor staggered under the burden of the other. If there is any curse in comedy, unadulterated by lying, malice, or envy, he never knew it. He knew—none better—that the author who would command the tears that purify and sweeten life must move the laughter that lightens it. What says our Shakespeare?—

*Jog on, jog, on the foot-path way,
And merrily hent the stile-a,
A merry heart goes all the day,
Your sad tires in a mile-a.*

Eugene Field trod the footpath way to popularity and fame with a buoyant and merry heart. If there was any abatement of his joyous spirits I never knew it, and I do not think that his writings disclose any sweeter strain, as his brother suggests, in the days when ill-health checked the ardor of his boyish exuberance, but could not dim the unextinguishable flame of his comedy. The two books that contain what to the last he considered his choicest work—a judgment confirmed by their continued popularity and sale, “A Little Book of Western Verse” and “A Little Book of Profitable Tales”—were compiled from the writings (1878-1887) that flowed from his pen when he worshipped most assiduously at the shrine of the goddess of comedy and social intercourse.

I have been tempted into this digression in order that the reader may not be at a loss to reconcile the apparent frivolity of Field’s life and the mass of his writings at this period with the winnowed product as it appeared in the two volumes just mentioned. Out of the comedy of his nature came the sweetness of his work, and out of his association with all conditions of his fellow-men came that insight into the springs of human passion and action that leavens all that he wrote, from “The Robin and the Violet” (1884) down to “The Love Affairs of a Bibliomaniac” (1895).

The general character of Eugene Field’s life and writing went through a gradual process of evolution from the time of his arrival in Chicago to the final chapters of “The Love Affairs,” which were his last work. But it can be safely divided into two periods of six years each, with the turning point at the publication of his little books of verse and tales in the year 1889. Nearly all that he wrote previous to that year was marked by his association with his kind; that which he wrote subsequently was saturated with his closer association with books. About all the preparation he needed for his daily “wood-sawing” was a hurried glance through the local papers and his favorite exchanges, among which the New York Sun held first place, with the others unplaced. He

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insisted that the exchange editor should send to his desk daily a dozen or more small country sheets from the most out of the way places—papers that recorded the painting of John Doe's front fence or that Seth Smith laid an egg on the editor's table with a breezy "come again, Seth, the Lord loveth a cheerful liar." When Field had accumulated enough of these items to suit his humor, he would paraphrase them, and, substituting the names of local or national celebrities, as the incongruity tickled his fancy, he would print them in his column under the heading of local, social, literary, or industrial notes, as the case might be. He seldom changed the form of these borrowed paragraphs materially, for he held most shrewdly that no humorist could improve upon the unconscious humor of the truly rural scribe. Field never outgrew the enjoyment and employment of this distinctively American appreciation of humor. As late as October 29th, 1895, "The Love Affairs" had to wait while he regaled the readers of the Chicago Record with his own brand of "Crop Reports from East Minonk," of which the following will serve as specimens:

All are working to get in the corn crop as if they never expected to raise another crop. The schools are almost deserted, and even the schoolm'ams may yet be drafted in as huskers. As the season advances the farmers begin to realize the immensity of the crop, and the dangers and difficulties of handling it. Owing to its cumbersomeness the old-fashioned way of handling it becomes obsolete, and new methods will have to be adopted and hydraulic machinery procured. Many new uses can be made of the corn-stalks, such as flag-poles for school-houses, telegraph poles and sewer-pipes. By hollowing out a corn-stalk it will make the very best of windmill towers, as the plunger-rod can be placed inside, thus protecting it from the weather, and if desired, an excellent fountain can be obtained by perforating the joints with an awl. A freight train on the Santa Fe railroad was delayed four hours last Saturday by a corn-stalk in Jake Schlosser's field, which had been undermined by hogs, falling across the track. It was removed with a crane and considerable difficulty by the wrecking crew.

The town of Hegler, on the Kankakee, Minonk and Western railroad, is invisible in a forest of corn. A search party under the direction of the road commissioners are looking for it.

These solemnly exaggerated crop notes were strung out to the extent of over half a column. Some will question the wit of such fantastic extravagance, but Field had early learned the truth of Puck's exclamation: "Lord, what fools these mortals be!" He knew that there was absolutely no bounds to the gullibility of mankind, and he felt it a part of his mission to cater to it to the top of its bent. One of his most successful impositions was international in its scope. On September 13th, 1886, the following paragraph, based on the current European news of the day, appeared in his column:

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We do not see that Prince Alexander, the deposed Bulgarian monarch, is going to have very much difficulty in keeping the wolf away from the door. In addition to the income from a \$2,000,000 legacy, he has a number of profitable investments in America which he can realize upon at any time. He owns considerable real estate in Chicago, Kansas City, Denver, and Omaha, and he is a part owner of one of the largest ranches in New Mexico. His American property is held in the name of Alexander Marie Wilhelm Ludwig Maraschkoff, and his interests in this country are looked after by Colonel J.S. Norton, the well-known attorney of this city. Colonel Norton tells us that he would not be surprised if Prince Alexander were to come to this country to live. In a letter to Colonel Norton last June the Prince said: "If ever it is in divine pleasure to release us from the harassing responsibilities which now rest upon us, it will be our choice to find a home in that great country beyond the Atlantic, where, removed from the intrigues of court and state, we may enjoy that quiet employment and peaceful meditation for which we have always yearned."

Now it must be confessed that this bears a sufficient air of verisimilitude to deceive the casual reader. It is as perfect a specimen of the pure invention which Field delighted to deck out in the form of truth with facts and the names of real personages as he ever wrote. In that year not only Englishmen, but other foreigners, were investing in American real estate. James S. Norton was indeed a well-known attorney of Chicago, as he deserved to be for his wit and professional ability. He was on such friendly terms with Field that the latter thought nothing of taking any liberty he pleased with his name whenever it served to lend credibility to an otherwise unconvincing narrative. In subsequent paragraphs Field answered fictitious inquiries as to Mr. Norton's reality by giving his actual address, with the result that Mr. Norton was pestered with correspondence from all over the union offering opportunities to invest Prince Alexander's funds.

But the success of this hoax was not confined to the American side of the Atlantic, as the following paragraph from *London Truth* shortly after proves:

I gave some particulars a few weeks ago of the large amount of property which had been extracted from Bulgaria by Prince Alexander, who arrived at Sofia penniless, except for a sum of money which was advanced to him by the late Emperor of Russia. It is now asserted by the American papers that Prince Alexander has made considerable purchases under an assumed name (Alexander Marie Wilhelm Ludwig Maraschkoff) of real estate in Chicago, Denver, Kansas City, and Omaha, and that he is part owner of one of the largest sheep ranches in New Mexico. The Prince's property in America is under the charge of Colonel Norton, a well-known attorney of Chicago. Prince Alexander must be possessed of a true Yankee cuteness if he managed to squeeze the "pile" for these investments out of Bulgaria in addition to the £70,000 to which I referred recently. The Russian papers have accused him of dabbling in stock exchange speculations, and if disposed for such business, his position must have given him some excellent opportunities of making highly profitable bargains.

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Thus was Prince Alexander convicted of having burglarized Bulgaria upon an invention which should not have deceived Mr. Labouchere. How that ostentatiously manufactured alias ever imposed on Truth passes comprehension. Is it any wonder that at one of our numerous mid-day lunches "Colonel" Norton fired the following rhyming retort at Field?

TO EUGENE FIELD

Forgive, dear youth, the forwardness
Of her who blushing sends you this,
Because she must her love confess,
Alas! Alas! A lass she is.

Long, long, so long, her timid heart
Has held its joy in secrecy,
Being by nature's cunning art
So made, so made, so maidenly.

She knew you once, but as a pen
In humor dipt in wisdom's pool,
And gladly gave her homage then
To one, to one, too wonderful;

But having seen your face, so mild,
So pale, so full of animus,
She can but cry in accents wild,
Eugene! Eugene! You genius!_

The deep and abiding interest Field felt in the fortunes of Prince Alexander may be inferred from his exclamation, "When Stofsky meets Etrovitch, then comes the tug of Servo-Bulgarian war!"

He took no end of pleasure in starting discussions over the authorship of verses and sayings by wilfully attributing them to persons whose mere name in such connection conveyed the sense of humorous impossibility, and he thoroughly enjoyed such suggestions being taken seriously. Once having started the ball of doubt rolling he never let it stop for want of some neat strokes of his cunning pen. Several noteworthy instances of this form of literary diversion or perversion occur to me. There never was any occasion to doubt the authorship of "The Lost Sheep," which won for Sally Pratt McLean wide popular recognition a decade and a half ago. Its first stanza will recall it to the memory of all:

*De massa of de sheep fol'
Dat guard de sheep fol' bin,*

*Look out in de gloomerin' meadows
Whar de long night rain begin—
So he call to de hirelin' shepa'd,
"Is my sheep, is dey all come in?"
Oh, den says de hirelin' shepa'd,
"Dey's some, dey's black and thin,
And some, dey's po'ol' wedda's,
But de res' dey's all brung in—
But de res' dey's all brung in."*

The very notoriety of the authorship of these lines merely served as an incentive for Field to print the following paragraph calling it in question:

Miss Sally McLean, author of "Cape Cod Folks," claims to have written the dialect poem, "Massa of de Sheep Fold," which the New York Sun pronounces a poetic masterpiece. We dislike to contradict Miss McLean, but candor compels us to say that we have reason to believe that she is not the author of the stanzas in question. According to the best of our recollection, this poem was dashed off in the wine-room of the Gault

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House, at Louisville, Ky., by Colonel John A. Joyce, from ten to twenty years ago. Joyce was in the midst of a party of convivial friends. After several cases of champagne had been tossed down, a member of the party said to Colonel Joyce, "Come, old fellow, give us an extempore poem." As Colonel Joyce had not utilized his muse for at least twenty minutes, he cordially assented to the proposition, and while the waiter was bringing a fresh supply of wine Colonel Joyce dashed off the dialect poem so highly praised by the New York Sun. We are amazed that he has laid no claim to its authorship since its revival. Unfortunately, all the gentlemen who were present at the time he dashed off the poem are dead, or there would be no trouble in substantiating his claims to its authorship. We distinctly remember he wrote it the same evening he dashed off the pretty poem so violently claimed by, and so generally accredited to, Mrs. Ella Wheeler Wilcox.

This was written in February, 1885, and though it failed of its ostensible aim of discrediting Miss McLean's authorship of "The Lost Sheep," it succeeded in rekindling throughout the exchanges the smouldering fires of the dispute Field had himself started over that of Ella Wheeler Wilcox's "Solitude," the relevant verse of which runs:

*Laugh, and the world laughs with you;
Weep, and you weep alone,
For the sad old earth must borrow its mirth,
But has troubles enough of its own.
Sing, and the hills will answer;
Sigh, it is lost on the air,
The echoes bound to a joyful sound,
But shrink from voicing care.*

From the day "Solitude" appeared in Miss Wheeler's "Poems of Passion" in 1883, and so long as Field lived, he never ceased to fan this controversy into renewed life, more often than not by assuming a tone of indignation that there should be any question over it, as in the following recurrence to the subject in July, 1885:

It is reported that Mrs. Ella Wheeler Wilcox is anxious to institute against Colonel John A. Joyce such legal proceedings as will determine beyond all doubt that she, and not Colonel Joyce, was the author of the poem entitled "Love and Laughter," and beginning:

"Laugh, and the world laughs with you; Weep, and you weep alone."

Mrs. Wilcox is perhaps the most touchy person in American literature at the present time. For a number of years she has been contributing to the newspaper press of the country, and her verses have been subjected to the harshest sort of criticism. The paragraphists of the press have bastinadoed and gibbeted her in the most cruel



manner; her poems have been burlesqued, parodied, and travestied heartlessly—in short, every variety of criticism has been heaped upon her work, which, even the most prejudiced will admit, has evinced remarkable boldness and an amazing facility of expression. Now we would suppose

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that all this shower of criticism had tanned the fair author's hide—we speak metaphorically—until it was impervious to every unkindly influence. But so far from being bomb-proof, Mrs. Wilcox is even more sensitive than when she bestrode her Pegasus for the first time and soared into that dreamy realm where the lyric muse abides. There is not a quip nor a quillet from the slangy pen of the daily newspaper writers that she does not brood over and worry about as heartily as if it were an overdue mortgage on her pianoforte. We presume to say that the protests which she has made within the last two years against the utterances of the press would fill a tome. Now this Joyce affair is simply preposterous; we do not imagine that there is in America at the present time an ordinarily intelligent person who has ever believed for one moment that Colonel Joyce wrote the poem in question—the poem entitled “Love and Laughter.” Colonel Joyce is an incorrigible practical joker, and his humor has been marvellously tickled by the prodigious worry his jest has cost the Wisconsin bard. The public understands the situation; there is no good reason why Mrs. Wilcox should fume and fret and scurry around, all on account of that poem, like a fidgety hen with one chicken. Her claim is universally conceded; there is no shadow of doubt that she wrote the poem in question, and by becoming involved in any further complication on this subject she will simply make a laughing-stock of herself; we would be sorry to see her do that.

And yet whenever his stock of subjects for comment or raillery ran low he would write a letter to himself, asking the address of Colonel John A. Joyce, the author of “Love and Laughter,” and manage in his answer to open up the whole controversy afresh. I suppose that to this day there are thousands of good people in the United States whose innocence has been abused by Field's superserviceable defence of Mrs. Wilcox's title to “Laugh and the World Laughs with You.” It was delicious fooling to him and to those of us who were on the inside, but I question if Mrs. Wilcox ever appreciated its humorous aspect.

Speaking of his practice of getting public attention for his own compositions through a letter of his own “To the Editor,” the following affords a good example of his ingenious method, with his reply:

EVANSTON, ILL., Aug. 15, 1888.

To the Editor:

Several of us are very anxious to learn the authorship of the following poem, which is to be found in so many scrap-books, and which ever and anon appears as a newspaper waif:

RESIGNATION



I have a dear canary bird,
That every morning sings
The sweetest songs I ever heard,
And flaps his yellow wings.

I love to sit the whole day long
Beside the window-sill,
And listen to the joyous song
That warbler loves to trill.

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My mother says that in a year
The bird that I've adored
Will maybe, lay some eggs and rear
A callow, cooing horde.

But father says it's quite absurd
To think that bird can lay,
For though it is a wondrous bird,
It isn't built that way.

Now whether mother tells me true
Or father, bothers me;
There's nothing else for me to do
But just to wait and see.

Whate'er befalls this bird of mine,
I am resolved 'twill please—
Far be it from me to repine
At what the Lord decrees._

Mr. Slason Thompson, compiler of "The Humbler Poets," could decide this matter for us if he were here now, but unhappily he is out of town just at present. We have a suspicion that the poem was originally written by Isaac Watts, but that suspicion is impaired somewhat by another suspicion that there were no such things as canary birds in Isaac Watts's time.

Yours truly,

MELISSA MAYFIELD.

We have shown this letter to Evanston's most distinguished citizen, the Hon. Andrew Shuman, and that sapient poet-critic tells us that as nearly as he can recollect the poem was written, not by Dr. Watts, but by an American girl. But whether that girl was Lucretia Davidson or Miss Ada C. Sweet he cannot recall. Mr. Francis F. Browne, of The Dial, thinks it is one of Miss Wheeler's earlier poems, since it is imbued with that sweet innocence, that childish simplicity, and that meek piety which have ever characterized the work of the famous Wisconsin lyrist. But as we can learn nothing positive as to the authorship of the poem, we shall have to call upon the public at large to help us out.

It is needless to say that the public at large could throw no light on the composition of this imitation of Dr. Watts with which Field was not already possessed, since both poem and "Melissa Mayfield" were creations of Field's fancy.

One of the most characteristic examples of the pains he would take to palm off a composition of his own upon some innocent and unsuspecting public man appeared in the Morning News on January 22d, 1887. It was nothing short of an attempt to father upon the late Judge Thomas M. Cooley the authorship of half a dozen bits of verse of varying styles and degrees of excellence. He professed to have received from Jasper Eastman, a prominent citizen of Adrian, Mich., twenty-eight poems written by Judge Cooley, "the venerable and learned jurist, recently appointed receiver of the Wabash Railroad." These were said to have appeared in the Ann Arbor Daily News when it was conducted by the judge's most intimate friend, between the years 1853 and 1861. Field anticipated public incredulity by saying that "people who knew him to be a severe moralist and a profound scholar will laugh you to scorn if you try to make them believe

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Cooley ever condescended to express his fancies in verse.” Then he went on to describe the judge, at the time of writing the verse, as “a long, awkward boy, with big features, moony eyes, a shock of coarse hair, and the merest shadow of a mustache,” in proof of which description he presented a picture of the young man, declared to be from a daguerrotype in the possession of Mr. Eastman. The first “specimen gem” was said to be a paraphrase from Theocritus, entitled “Mortality”:

*O Nicias, not for us alone
Was laughing Eros born,
Nor shines for us alone the moon,
Nor burns the ruddy morn.
Alas! to-morrow lies not in the ken
Of us who are, O Nicias, mortal men.*

Next followed a bit, “in lighter vein, from the Simonides of Amorgas,” entitled “A Fickle Woman”:

*Her nature is the sea’s, that smiles to-night A radiant maiden in the moon’s soft light;
The unsuspecting seaman sets his sails, Forgetful of the fury of her gales; To-morrow,
mad with storms, the ocean roars, And o’er his hapless wreck her flood she pours.*

Field then went on to describe Judge Cooley as equally felicitous in Latin verse, presenting in proof thereof the following, “sung at the junior class supper at Ann Arbor, May 14th, 1854”:

*Nicyllam bellis oculis—
(Videre est amare),
Carminibus et poculis,
Tra la la, tra la la,
Me placet propinare:
Tra la la, tra la la,—
Me placet propinare!*

Beside such grotesque literary horse-play as this, with a gravity startling in its unexpected daring, Field proceeded to attribute to the venerable jurist one of the simplest and purest lullabies that ever came from his own pen, opening with:

*I hear Thy voice, dear Lord;
I hear it by the stormy sea
When winter nights are bleak and wild,
And when, affright, I call to Thee;*

*It calms my fears and whispers me,
"Sleep well, my child."*

Then follows "The Vision of the Holy Grail," one of those exercises in archaic English in which Field took infinite pains as well as delight, and to which, as a production of Judge Cooley's, he paid the passing tribute of saying that it was "a graceful imitation of old English." As an example of the judge's humorous vein Field printed the conclusion of his lines "To a Blue Jay":

*When I had shooed the bird away
And plucked the plums—a quart or more—
I noted that the saucy jay,
Albeit he had naught to say,
Appeared much bluer than before.*

After crediting the judge with a purposely awful parody on "Dixie," in which "banner" is made to rhyme with "Savannah," and "holy" with "Pensacola," Field concluded the whimsical fabrication with the serious comment: "It seems a pity that such poetic talent as Judge Cooley evinced was not suffered to develop. His increasing professional duties and his political employments put a quietus to those finer intellectual indulgences with which his earlier years were fruitful."

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Having launched this piece of literary drollery, over which he had studied and we had talked for a week or more, Field proceeded to clinch the verse-making on Judge Cooley by a series of letters to himself, one or two of which will indicate the fertile cleverness and humor he employed to cram his bald fabrication down the public gullet. The first appeared on January 24th, in the following letter "to the Editor":

I have read Judge Cooley's poems with a good deal of interest. I am somewhat of a poet myself, having written sonnets and things now and then for the last twenty years. My opinion is that Judge Cooley's translations, paraphrases, and imitations, are much worthier than his original work. I hold that no poet can be a true poet unless he is at the same time somewhat of a naturalist. If Judge Cooley had been anything of a naturalist he would never have made such a serious blunder as he has made in his poem entitled "Lines to a Blue Jay." The idea of putting a blue jay into a plum-tree is simply shocking! I don't know when I've had anything grate so harshly upon my feelings as did this mistake when I discovered it this morning. It is as awful as the blunder made by one of the modern British poets (I forget his name) in referring to the alligators paddling about in Lake Erie. The blue jay (*Cyanurus cristatus*) does not eat plums, and therefore does not infest plum-trees.

Yours truly,

CADMON E. BATES.

Upon which Field, in his editorial plurality, commented:

To Professor Bates's criticism we shall venture no reply. We think, however, that allowance should be made for the youth of the poet when he committed the offence which so grievously torments our correspondent. It might be argued, too, that the jay of which the poet treats is no ordinary bird, but is one of those omnivorous creatures which greedily pounce upon everything coming within their predatory reach.

And two days later he made bold to crush the judge's critics with letters from the same versatile pen that never failed to aid in the furtherance of its master's hoaxes:

To the Editor: Prof. Bates may be a good taxidermist, but he knows little of ornithology. Never before he spoke was it denied that the *Cyanurus cristatus* (blue jay) fed upon plums. All the insect-eating birds also eat of the small fruits. It is plain that the poet knew this, even though the taxidermist didn't.

Yours truly,

L.R. COWPERTHWAIT.

To the Editor: Isn't Prof. Bates too severe in his claim that genius like that of the poetic Judge Cooley should be bound down by the prosaic facts of ornithology? Milton

scorned fidelity to nature, especially when it came to ornithological details, and poets, as a class, have been singularly wayward in this respect. My impression is that Judge Cooley has simply made use of a poetic license which any fair-minded person should be willing to concede the votaries of the muse.

Yours truly,

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J.G.K.

The echoes of Judge Cooley's youthful verse were never permitted to die wholly out of Field's column, but were frequently given renewed life by casual references. Even the publication of "The Divine Lullaby" in his "Little Book of Western Verse" did not prevent Field from speaking of Judge Cooley's poetical diversions.

On another occasion he spent his odd time for weeks in preparing a humorous hoax upon the critics of Chicago. It consisted of a number of close imitations of the typical verses of Dr. Watts, in which he was a master. The fruits of his congenial labor on this occasion are preserved in his collected works. But the purpose for which they were prepared adds to their interest. They were incorporated in a prose article which gave a plausible account of how they had been exhumed from the correspondence of a sentimental friend of Watts. When the last strokes had been put upon the story, whose tone of genuineness was calculated to deceive the elect, it was mailed to Charles A. Dana, who was thoroughly in sympathy with Field in all such enterprises, and on the following Sunday it appeared in the New York Sun as an extract from a London paper. As soon as the publication reached Chicago a number of the cleverest reporters on the News staff were sent out to interview the local literary authorities. They were all carefully coached by Field what questions to ask and what points to avoid, and their reports were all turned over to him to prepare for publication. Next morning the better part of a page of the News was surrendered to quotations from the fictitious article, with learned dissertations on the value of the discovery, coupled with careful comparisons of the style and sentiments of the verse with the acknowledged work of Watts. In the whole city only one of those interviewed was saved, by a sceptical analysis, from falling into the pit so adroitly prepared by Field.

Loyal to Chicago, to a degree incomprehensible by those who judged his sentiments by his unsparing comments on its crudities in social and literary ways, he never ceased to get pleasure out of serio-comic confounding of its business activities and artistic aspirations. Its business men and enterprises were constantly referred to in his column as equally strenuous in the pursuit of the almighty dollar and of the higher intellectual life. In his view "Culture's Garland," from the Chicago stand-point, was, indeed, a string of sausages. Of this spirit the following, printed in December, 1890, is a good example:

A DANGER THAT THREATENS

The rivalry between the trade and the literary interests in Chicago has been wondrously keen this year.

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Prof. Potwins, the most eminent of our statisticians, figures that we now have in the midst of us either a poet or an author to every square yard within the corporate limits, and he estimates that in ten years' time we shall have a literary output large enough to keep all the rest of the world reading all the time.

Our trade has been increasing, too. Last September 382,098 cattle were received, against 330,994 in September of 1889. So far this year the increase over 1889 in the receipts of hogs is 2,000,000.

Last year not more than 2,700 young authors contributed stories to the Christmas number of the Daily News: this year the number of contributors reached 6,125.

Hitherto the rivalry between our trade and our literature has been friendly to a degree. The packer has patronized the poet; metaphorically speaking, the hog and the epic have lain down together and wallowed in the same Parnassan pool. The censures that have swung continually in the temple of the muses have been replenished with lard oil, and to our grateful olfactories has the joyous Lake breezes wafted the refreshing odors of sonnets and of slaughter pens commingled. But how long is this sort of thing going to last? It surely cannot be the millennium. These twin giants will some day—alas, too soon—learn their powers and be greedy to test them against one another. A fatal jealousy seems to be inevitable; it may be fended off, but how? The world's fair will be likely to precipitate a conflict between the interests of which we speak. Each interest is already claiming precedence, and we hear with alarm that less than a week ago one of our most respected packers threatened to withdraw his support of the international copyright bill unless the Chicago Literary Society united in an indorsement of his sugar-cured hams. When we think of the horrors that will attend and follow a set-to between Chicago trade and Chicago literature, we are prone to cry out, in the words of the immortal Moore—not Tom—but Mrs. Julia A., of Michigan:

*An awful tremor quakes the soul!
And makes the heart to quiver,
While up and down the spine doth roll
A melancholy shiver.*

In December, 1895, Edmund Clarence Stedman contributed to the "Souvenir Book" of the New York Hebrew Fair a charmingly appreciative, yet justly critical, tribute to Eugene Field, whom he likened to Shakespeare's Yorick, whose "motley covered the sweetest nature and tenderest heart." Mr. Stedman there speaks of Field as a "complex American with the obstreperous *bizarre* of the frontier and the artistic delicacy of our oldest culture always at odds within him—but he was above all a child of nature, a frolic incarnate, and just as he would have been in any time or country." He also tells how Field put their friendship to one

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of those tests which sooner or later he applied to all—the test of linking their names with something utterly ludicrous and impossible, but published with all the solemn earmarks of verity. It was on the occasion of Mr. Stedman's visit to Chicago on its invitation to lecture before the Twentieth Century Club. This gave Field the cue to announce the coming event in a way to fill the visitor with consternation. About two weeks before the poet-critic was expected, Field's column contained the following innocent paragraph: Mr. Edmund Clarence Stedman, the poet, and the foremost of American critics, is about to visit Chicago. He comes as the guest of the Twentieth Century Club, and on the evening of Tuesday, the 28th inst., he will deliver before that discriminating body an address upon the subject of "Poetry," this address being one of the notable series which Mr. Stedman prepared for and read before the undergraduates of Johns Hopkins University last winter. These discourses are, as we judge from epitomes published in the New York Tribune, marvels of scholarship and of criticism. Twenty years have elapsed, as we understand, since Mr. Stedman last visited Chicago. He will find amazing changes, all in the nature of improvements. He will be delighted with the beauty of our city and with the appreciation, the intelligence, and the culture of our society. But what should and will please him most will be the cordiality of that reception which Chicago will give him, and the enthusiasm with which she will entertain this charming prince of American letters, this eminent poet, this mighty good fellow!

I doubt if Mr. Stedman ever saw this item, which Field merely inserted, as was his wont, as a prelude to the whimsical announcement which followed in two days, and which was eagerly copied in the New York papers in time to make Mr. Stedman cast about for some excuse for being somewhere else than in Chicago on the 29th of April, 1891. This second notice is too good an instance of the liberty Field took with the name of a friend in his delectable vocation of laying "the knotted lash of sarcasm" about the shoulders of wealth and fashion of Chicago, not to be quoted in full. It was given with all the precision of typographical arrangement that is considered proper in printing a veritable programme of some public procession, in the following terms:

Chicago literary circles are all agog over the prospective visit of Mr. Edmund Clarence Stedman, the eminent poet-critic. At the regular monthly conclave of the Robert Browning Benevolent and Patriotic Association of Cook County, night before last, it was resolved to invite Mr. Stedman to a grand complimentary banquet at the Kinsley's on Wednesday evening, the 29th. Prof. William Morton Payne, grand marshal of the parade which is to conduct the famous guest from the railway station the morning he arrives, tells us that the procession will be in this order:

Twenty police officers afoot.

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The grand marshal, horseback, accompanied by ten male members of the Twentieth Century Club, also horseback.

Mr. Stedman in a landau drawn by four horses, two black and two white.

The Twentieth Century Club in carriages.

A brass band afoot.

The Robert Browning Club in Frank Parmelee's 'buses.

The Homer Clubs afoot, preceded by a fife-and-drum corps and a real Greek philosopher attired in a tunic.

Another brass band.

A beautiful young woman playing the guitar, symbolizing Apollo and his lute in a car drawn by nine milk-white stallions, impersonating the muses.

Two Hundred Chicago poets afoot.

The Chicago Literary Club in carriages.

A splendid gilded chariot bearing Gunther's Shakespeare autograph and Mr. Ellsworth's first printed book.

Another brass band.

Magnificent advertising car of Armour and Co., illustrating the progress of civilization.

The Fishbladder Brigade and the Blue Island Avenue Shelley Club.

The fire department.

Another brass band.

Citizens in carriages, afoot and horseback.

Advertising cars and wagons.

The line of march will be an extensive one, taking in the packing-houses and other notable points. At Mr. Armour's interesting professional establishment the process of slaughtering will be illustrated for the delectation of the honored guest, after which an appropriate poem will be read by Decatur Jones, President of the Lake View Elite Club.

Then Mr. Armour will entertain a select few at a champagne luncheon in the scalding-room. In high literary circles it is rumored that the Rev. F.M. Bristol has got an option on all autographs that Mr. Stedman may write during his stay in Chicago. Much excitement has been caused by this, and there is talk of an indignation meeting in Battery D, to be addressed by the Rev. Flavius Gunsaulus, the Rev. Frank W. Brobst, and other eminent speakers.

Small wonder that Mr. Stedman's soul was filled with trepidation as his train approached Chicago, and that he was greatly relieved as it rolled into the station to find only a few friends awaiting him; and among them he quickly singled out Eugene Field, "his sardonic face agrin like a school-boy's."

Enough has been written and quoted to give the reader a fair idea of the general character of Eugene Field's daily work and of the spirit that inspired it. As Mr. Stedman has said, the work of the journeyman and the real literary artist appeared cheek by jowl in his column. The best of it has been preserved in his collected works. That given in this chapter is merely intended to show how he illuminated the lightest and most ephemeral topics of the day with a literary touch at once acute and humorous, and certainly unconventional. In the Appendix to these volumes the reader will find a review of the fictitious biography of Miss Emma Abbott, the once noted opera singer. It is an ingenious piece of work and will repay reading as a satire on current reviewing, besides illustrating the daring liberty Field could take with anyone whom he reckoned a friend.

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The following paragraph, which will serve as a tail-piece to this chapter, printed May 31st, 1894, shows how the playful raillery which marked his earlier work in and about Chicago survived to the end:

The oldest house in Chicago stands on the West Side, and was built in 1839 A.D. The oldest horse in Chicago works for the Lake View Street-Car Company, and was present at the battle of Marathon 490 B.C.

END OF VOL. I.