

MRS. E. S. LEWARS
SEMINARY RIDGE
GETTYSBURG, PA.

May 17, 1944.

So much has been
said against Stevens
that it is always
pleasant to report
for him. I thought
you would be interested
in hearing about
"bid." The hunters
of Pine Grove, Md.

Also Mrs. Caldomia
preserved the tails of
the deer they shot and
the party which had
fewest at the end of
the season divided
the others, hence the
interest in this deer's
tail.

This may be deposited
with the Stevens Papers
if you wish.

E. S. L.

The Star and Sentinel. Buehler & Co Publishers.
Gettysburg, Pa., Tuesday evening, July 7, 1874.

The Old Commoner.

"His innate reverence of right and love of justice, his wonderful power of memory, analysis and concentration; his truthfulness, his perseverance, his thorough fairness in all business transactions, and his generous kindness to all - made him a man towering so high above the millions around him, that no one who intelligently studies his character can fail to appreciate his greatness."

"True, true," said my familiar friend Byng, "a gifted mind moulding thought and directing events cannot be measured by official record more than by the pen of the most loving and wise biographer. The life and its influence alone tells the story," and he closed his book.

"Whose life? Who?" I asked, for the above quotation unsolicited and suddenly interrupted my reading of the evening daily as it burst from my collocutor's lips in the enthusiasm of his appreciation.

"Thrice in my life I have met him, and each time he impressed me as never another man before or since," Byng continued.

I was metamorphosed into a five-foot-four interrogation point, which Byng perceiving, he laid his head back, introverted his vision by closing his eyes, and continued.

"Thirty-eight years ago, one spring morning, four jolly Freshmen, of whom I was the fifth, entered the two-horse stage coach, that ran between Harrisburg and Gettysburg, en route for Pennsylvania College. It was seven o'clock and the old Scotch-Irish driver, whose weakness lay in fear of wearying the "puir beasts" if they go beyond a snail's gallop, stood by the door impatiently cracking his long whip, when a gentleman of nearly six feet in height, wrapped in a long cloth cloak, with a club foot and a high black hat, emerged from the stage office followed by a half dozen men.

"Handle these horses carefully today, Sawney. See that you don't run them too hard, and if you hear us youngsters making too much noise, blow us up with your horn," was his address to the driver as he clattered in after us.

"Aye, aye, sir," said Sawney, as he clanged to the door, while the stranger, courteously responding to the hearty goodbye of those without, leaned back in one corner, and with a glance that seemed to read us through with electric swiftness said:

"Well, boys! I look forward to a long ride, rough roads, and pleasant company. What is your prospect?"

"It had been that of having 'a high old time', previous to the unexpected and undesired addition of the sixth passenger, hence I remember scrutinizing him with more of rude than intelligent curiosity. He was of noble physique, strongly built but not corpulent, athletic-looking and with a full broad chest that indicated abundant lung power to balance his splendid head. These united with his high, square forehead, clear and ruddy complexion, teeth as clean and evenly set as grains of white corn on the cob, and dark blue lustrous eyes, impressed even me, a young savage, as being the perfect harmony of manly strength and beauty. He had doubtless lived thirty-five or forty years, yet the wisdom and majesty of ripe three score, with the boyish vim and enthusiasm of my own age, were so singularly blended in him that whether he was to be more revered as a man, or loved as a boy, I have not yet determined.

"It was not long before he had learned all about us. Our names, destination, aims, and peculiar characteristics all stood revealed; but by what species of necromancy he had gained his information, I had not the acumen to discover.

"Among my boyish delights was horseback riding, and in my dreams I had already won more laurels as a fox-hunter than any English squire who had ever swept over his native 'Downs'. I distinctly remember how he won my sympathy by saying:

"I wish you had been with me, Byng, during my last deer-hunt, that would have been a grand chance for you to show your mettle. Do you see that line of low blue hills to the west? They are behind Caledonia Furnace where I spend some of my hours, and alive with deer. A party of us, men and hounds, had been on the chase of a fat buck since sunrise. I have an old pointer named Cid, whose nose is as unerring as an Indian's arrow. I was in the advance, but had lost both the buck's and dog's track when Cid came dashing by me with the full pack after him, and went racing like mad across the enclosed meadow. I followed to keep the dogs out of mischief. When I came up, the whole of them had surrounded a spring-house, the door of which was padlocked, and were making a fearful racket. Although the air was keen and frosty, an old woman sat on the porch of a small farm-house nearby, knitting as complacently as though hunters and hounds were as much an everyday affair in that quiet nook as clover blossoms in June.

"Good day, Madam," said I. 'Will you allow me to get my deer from your spring-house?'

"I spoke very politely, Byng, for I thought of my own dear grandmother, who would have given me the moon if I had asked for it.

"'And how in the name of sense would you suppose a deer could get through a stone wall? Be off with your foolin' an' put your dogs in your pocket. I can't be chasin' 'em with my rheumatiz," she replied and the tang of her voice was sharper than butter milk.

"'I obediently went to call off the hounds, but Cid's eyes were as truth-telling as a rainbow, and they said respectfully, 'We have chased the buck in here and cannot leave him for anybody.'"

"' So I renewed my attack upon the old lady, while the baying and pawing of the hounds threatened to batter the door down. She knit on and never dropped a stitch, meanwhile asserting that there was nothing in the spring-house but milk-pots,"and the thunder and fuss your dogs are makin' is enough to turn my cream sour."

"'Now, said I, seeing that she was immovable, 'let us compromise, you keep all the cream and give me a very little skim milk. In other words, you keep the deer and just give me his tail.'

"She looked at me first under and then over her spectacles.

"'His tail! Be you in earnest, man?"

"'As surely as you were when you locked up my buck after he had run in there for shelter."

"'And I can have the rest of the poor brute?"

"'Yes, so that I can get his tail."

"'Umph. He's cheap venison," she said coolly taking the key from out her deep pocket, and all I had to show for that day's hard chase was one gray brush!

"The elegant pantomime which accompanied his relation of the simple incident made our old coach ring with laughter, yet so ready was his power of adaptation and so big his generous heart that not half an hour afterward he was impressing upon us with all the force of his unusual magnetism, what great superiority character possessed over mere reputation; all, because Vance Kane, who seemed gentle as a girl, had been artlessly lamenting to us how he had won the title "Bully Kane" by simply defending a much-abused 'little darkey' who has the misfortune to live in his native village."

"I cannot wait a minute longer, Byng. Who was your Magnus Apollo? He surely had a name. Had your ride occurred nineteen centuries or even one I might surmise he was Julius Caesar of George Washington traveling incog."

"He will stand out on the pages of history as grandly as either when seen through the glamor of passing years. His intellectual and moral strength will mark the age in which he lives as an important epoch of freedom and progression," replied Byng.

"But you must bide your time as we boys did, to find out who he was, for not withstanding his genial frankness of manner, his playful jokes and sometimes his most earnest and serious talk, there was a peculiar dignity about him which repelled the slightest attempt at any undue familiarity on our part.

"As he had predicted at starting, the ride was rough. For four hours we were thumped over a state road that was a succession of small cliffs, hinged with ravines and gashed with ruts, until we reached a long, low, half-frame and half-log building painted the color of dust. On the opposite side of the road was a large sign suspended by hooks, fastened between two upright posts about thirteen feet from the ground, which swung and creaked with the gentlest breeze. Upon it was painted a picture of General Jackson, in uniform, mounted, and lest the wayfaring man, though a fool, might not discover the fact, the artist had written beneath the figure, 'General Jackson at the Battle of New Orleans.' Below this, nailed against one of the posts was the proprietor's name, and the words 'United States Mail Coach Hotel.'

"Along the entire front of the inn was a low porch level with the ground. Behind the house was the finely stocked barnyard of a well-to-do Pennsylvania farmer. Parallel with the road was a wide green meadow sloping down to a stream filled with calamus leaves and horse-mint, while in the neighborhood the now historic South Mountain lay against the pearly white sky, in curves as softly swelling and round as a woman's full cheek.

"Hold back, Byng, you are off the track of your story. Why did you stop there?"

"Because the stage did, of course.

"Here boys, we and the horses dine," said the gentleman and leaping after him we boys followed into the bar-room. The oak floor was uncarpeted. A huge ten-plate stove, as shiny as Sunday boots stood in the middle of the large room, while overhead were the unceiled joists, as dark and rough as when first sawed. In one corner was a circular pen of planed but unpainted boards, outwardly resembling the prisoner's box of an old-fashioned courthouse. This was the bar. Upon it stood an earthen pitcher and six green tumblers, while concealed from view on a shelf underneath was the stock of liquors, consisting of three or four plain black bottles containing domestic whiskey, peach brandy and gin, and a keg of hard cider, all of which retailed at five cents a glass. In addition to the beverages were boxes of cigars designated as half-Spanish and common. The former sold for two and the latter four for a cent.

"A long pine table surrounded by benches and a few wooden chairs completed the furnishing of the United States Mail Coach hostelry; upon the table lay a pack of soiled cards and a box of dominoes. At the rear end of the room, hanging against the wall, was a board three feet long by two wide, on which was painted concentric circles in red, blue and white, the smallest, however, called the target or bull's eye, being black. Alongside the board, resting on hooks, were two wooden tubes, three feet long.

Sharp needles of awls whose ends were wrapped with tow and made sufficiently thick to fit with ease in the mouths of the tubes, were impelled through them by blowing. The lucky individual whose lungs were the longest and aim surest to strike within or near the bull's eye obtained the wager which was either whiskey or cigars.

"Nodding carelessly to a young man behind the bar who made an awkward bow in response, our friend advanced to the bar, saying 'Here boys, let me test the power of your five bellows. Sound heads and sound hearts depend a good deal more than you imagine upon sound lungs. I have not fired off a pop-gun for many a day - but I will wager the boiled pig's tail we get for dinner that you will not beat me.'

"At it we went laughing and joking with equal vigor, until the entrance of a well-dressed man interrupted us. Instantly approaching our friend in the most cordial manner he clasped his hand, and shook it heartily, exclaiming,

"My dear sir, this is a pleasure I did not expect.'

"After a few more congratulatory words, he added as he hopped toward the bar,

"What shall I have the pleasure of drinking with you - brandy or whiskey?'

"I thank you, I desire neither," replied our friend pleasantly.

"Come, let me insist upon your having some. I am thirsty as a fish. Say what it shall be," asked the stranger eagerly.

Again the proffer was firmly but politely declined.

"Mr. Stevens," he said, while the color mounted to his forehead. 'I know what you mean, but a fellow can take a drink half a dozen times a day without getting drunk. I don't drink to excess myself.'

"Sir," answered he who had been addressed as Mr. Stevens, with an impressiveness of manner worth a dozen temperance lectures, 'it has been the rule of my life that any one who smokes a cigar, takes a chew of tobacco, a glass of liquor, a pinch of snuff, smokes, chews, drinks, and snuffs to excess. Now, Harvey, you rogue, you cheated me that time.'

Appealing to me, as turning to the board he saw Harvey's needle had gone very near the eye, but I was dumb with the bewilderment born of a sudden conviction. This noble gentleman so wise, courteous, brave and trustful, who had already fascinated me beyond any human being with whom I had been brought in contact, whom I had been taught to believe was as fierce and unrelenting as Nona Sahib and as politically base as the traitor Arnold."

"And was it really the Great Commoner, Byng?" I asked as much interested as though I had been listening to the opening chapters of a first-rate novel.

"Well, he looked at me for a moment, then with that wonderful insight into another's soul which made his enemies hate and fear him as something almost supernatural, he said with a smile half sad and half mischievous.

"Yes, my boy. I understand it all. You have heard that I was one of the devil's children and that even this poor club foot was a proof of my parentage, but Byng, look at me through your own pure eyes, and I will engage to 'stand fire'.

The occasion of Mr. Stevens' ride on that to me, memorable spring day, was his return to his home in Adams County at the close of the legislature session of 1835; a session which, thanks to the pure philanthropy and terrible earnestness of Mr. Stevens, doubtless did more for the development of future greatness and prosperity of Pennsylvania than any which preceded or will follow it.