

A ROMANTIC EPISODE IN THE LIFE OF THE POET, FITZ-GREENE HALLECK

BY STANLEY M. WARD

AS FROM some newly opened chest or drawer, where it has lain concealed and forgotten, lo, these many years, there comes the delicious odour of sweet lavender or dainty mignonette, permeating the air and diffusing its fragrance all around, so, through the vista of over three-quarters of a century, there comes this story of a romance in the life of the poet, Fitz-Greene Halleck.

Everybody knows that Mr. Halleck lived and died a bachelor. Whether the successful efforts of Miss Flanner, whom he never knew by any other name than "Ellen Campbell," to evade him and to hide her personality, had aught to do with his failure to become a benedict, I cannot say, though I suspect they had. Of this episode in his career the poet once said: "In a life filled with not an inconsiderable number of pleasurable experiences, I look back on my correspondence with the lady I knew as Miss Campbell, as the most pleasant, regretting only, that I failed to ever become acquainted with her and that this might not have resulted in a ripe fruition."

There was gathered at the house of one of their number in Mount Pleasant, Ohio, on the evening of January 1, 1840, a gay company of youths. As the festivities lulled someone proposed that each lady present take advantage of her prerogative and send a letter to the literary man whose writings she most admired, telling him of the gathering, informing him that it was

Leap Year and requesting the honour of a reply.

No one appears to have considered this suggestion seriously except one person, a fair young Quakeress, Miss Abbie Flanner. Soon after the idea was broached she slipped unobserved from the company and was speeding her way along the snow-white path to her parent's house, not far distant. She had long admired the writings of Fitz-Greene Halleck, whose *Marco Bozzaris* was a favourite school recitation of our fathers. She determined to compose a poem and send it to him with a short note. Sitting down to work Miss Flanner had completed the following about the time the grey dawn of a winter's morning broke:

THE MERRY MOCK BIRD'S SONG

NEW YEAR'S NIGHT

O'er fields of snow, the moonlight falls
And softly on the snow white walls
Of Albi's cottage shine,
And there, beneath the breath of June
The honeysuckle's gay festoon
And multiflora shine.

And form a sweet, embowered shade,
Pride of the humble cottage maid,
Who now, transformed and bold,
Beneath the shadow of a name
Those equal rights presumes to claim,
Rights urged by young and old.

And who is she, to fame unknown
Who dares her challenge thus throw down
Lo at the feet of one
Who holds a proud, conspicuous stand
Among the magnates of the land
The Muse's favourite son.

As when she roved a careless child
 To pluck some mountain blossom wild
 Oft climbed some pendant brow
 Of crag or cliff, to gather there
 Some tempting flower that seemed more
 fair

Than aught that bloomed below.

So now, like Eve in Paradise
 Though bounteous blossoms round her rise
 Of love and friendship blend
 With many a kindly blessing fraught,
 Would give them all for one kind thought,
 One word from Halleck's pen.

Like that fair plant of India's fields
 Which most were bruised or broken, yields
 Its fragrance to the air,
 Such is the heart I offer thee
 Pride of my country's minstrelsy
 Oh, is it worth thy care?

She signed this effusion "Ellen A. F. Campbell," incorporating her own initials with those of the heroine of Scott's *Lady of the Lake*, and sent it to Halleck, in New York. The first flush of excitement having worn away and Miss Flanner, no doubt looking at the matter from an impersonal standpoint, began to think pretty seriously of what she had done. Of course, it was all in fun and nothing very momentous could possibly come from it, still there remained the fact that she, a little, unknown Quaker girl, living on what was then, the confines of civilisation, had presumed to send a letter and a poem to the first literary man in America, at least one she considered such. (He had written one poem surely that will live.) But, reproaches and heart throbs were all in vain now. Had she known her Omar Khayyam she might have quoted "The moving finger writes," etc. The whole affair was out of her hands now and all she could do was to wait. Mails were not moved as quickly then as they are now, and it was several weeks ere the poet's re-

ply reached her. And when it did, with what feelings of trepidation, almost of fear, did she receive the packet and wonder at its contents. How had the great man received her missive? Had he snubbed her? Had he written her a curt note informing her that Leap Years were no reason for women forgetting their places? But one way could she find out and that was to open the parcel and examine the contents. We may imagine that she performed this task with trembling hands and fast beating heart. Oh, Joy! Not only had the great man answered her letter, but there was an original poem for her eyes alone. I doubt if there was a prouder woman in America that day.

TO ELLEN

THE MERRY MOCK BIRD'S SONG

The Scottish Minstrel's border lay
 Entranced me oft in boyhood's day
 His forests, glades and streams
 Mountains and heather blooming fair.
 A Highland lake and lady were
 The playmates of my dreams.

Time passed, my dreams were gone,
 My pilgrim footsteps pressed alone
 Loch Katrine's storied shore,
 And winds that winged me o'er the lake
 Breathed low, as if they feared to break
 The music of my oars.

No tramp of warrior men was heard,
 For welcome sound or challenge word
 I listened, but in vain,
 And moored beneath his favourite tree
 As vainly wooded the minstrelsy
 Of grey haired "Allan Bain."

I saw the Highland heath flower smile
 In beauty upon Ellen's isle
 And couched in Ellen's bower
 I watched beneath the lattice leaves
 Her coming, through the summer eves
 Sweetest and loveliest hour.

She came not, lonely was her home,
 Herself of airy shapes that come
 Like shadows to depart,
 Are there two Ellens of the mind

Or, have I lived at last to find
An Ellen of the heart?

And well my heart responds to-day,
And willingly its chords obey
The Minstrel's loved command,
A Minstrel maid whose infant eyes
Looked on Ohio's woods and skies,
My schoolboy's sunset land.

And must I deem her winning smile
But a mere mockery, to beguile
Some lonely hour of care.
And will this Ellen prove to be
But like her namesake o'er the sea
An Ellen of the air?

Or, shall I take the Morning's wing
Armed with a parson and a ring,
Speed dale and hill along,
And at her cottage hearth, at night,
Change into flutterings of delight,
Or, what's more likely, to affright,
The "Merry Mock Bird's Song?"

Accompanying the verses was a letter in which he thanks her for her "beautiful lines" and begs her to accept a volume of his poems on account "of the beauty of the binding and the width of the margin." Further on he says, "although your letter did not intend to make me a happy man it has made me a very proud one." He concludes as follows, "I am, My dear Miss Campbell, yours very gratefully, or, if you are in earnest, which I very much fear you are not, I am, dearest Ellen, Yours affectionately, Fitz-Greene Halleck." Her answer to this is a letter of considerable length in which she thanks him for the promise of his book, stating "that expectation stands on tiptoe on the misty banks of the blue Ohio awaiting its coming." She assures him that when he is in "Fashion's crowded halls or listening to the voice of deathless fame, she would not claim one thought,

But, when the busy throng is gone,
And brightly on the Western sky

The sunset's embers brightly burn,
Oh, wilt thou thither turn thy eye
And give one kindly thought to her,
Whose spirit ever turns to thine,
Like India's idol worshipper,
Or Moslem to his prophet's shrine."

The correspondence thus begun continued throughout the year. The gay badinage which marked its beginning was succeeded by earnestness on both sides. As the poet grew more ardent in expressing his admiration and esteem for his fair letter writer, she, though still preserving her incognito and shielded to a certain extent thereby, grew more timid. At one time she tells him that "every step I have taken in your acquaintance has increased my diffidence and timidity. With a careless laugh I flung my first offering on the current of accident little thinking that it would bring me back laughter and tears, joys and sorrows, anxious thoughts and fevered dreams." As the year 1841 approached, she tells him that the term of her privilege has about expired and that the correspondence must stop. It appears that Halleck was much alarmed at the chance of losing his fair though unknown writer, for he answers almost immediately, in a communication filled evidently with "profound logic," as she replies, saying, "I certainly did think I had written to Mr. Halleck for the last time, but you know, before I confess it, that I am only too willing to be convinced by your profound 'logic,' that it is not only my 'privilege,' but my duty to continue the correspondence. Your witty assumption of your exclusive privilege has relieved my woman's pride from the 'bastile of a word' for whose adamant walls, I have perhaps, not shown a proper reverence." After the interchange of a few more

letters, the poet announces his intention of starting West and meeting face to face the lady whom, as "Ellen Campbell," he has learned to admire and esteem. Now was Miss Flanner troubled. We may assume that nothing would have caused her more pleasure than to accede to Halleck's wishes, but, she reflected, that even a tacit agreement would put her in the position of wooer, as she had begun the acquaintance by writing first. She waited some time before she answered this letter and then had it mailed in Washington, District of Columbia, where she sent it to a relative under cover. Halleck, of course, sent his reply to the capital city and in time it reached Miss Flanner. But she did not answer it. All efforts the author made by correspondence and otherwise to find her were in vain, and he was forced at last to admit that she must forever remain to him "An Ellen of the mind."

Miss Abbie Flanner was about twenty-six years old at the time of her acquaintance with Mr. Halleck. She is described as being rather above the average female height, had a demure and quiet expression as became a member of the Society of Friends. Her hair was of a golden brown colour and her eyes also brown, though changing at times to grey. They were very expressive and smiled more often than did her lips. Her talents in the epistolary line may be judged by her holding so

long a correspondence with so noted a literary lion as Halleck and his evident desire to continue it. In music, also, Miss Flanner excelled. In fact, she was undoubtedly possessed of those mental and physical gifts which fitted her to grace any position in the land. She had two brothers, both physicians, one of whom perished in the cholera epidemic which visited Pittsburgh, many years ago. Late in life Miss Flanner married a man, her social equal, it is said, but one who failed utterly to appreciate her intellectual gifts. She lived but a year afterward and lies buried, according to her request, on a bold bluff overlooking the Blue Ohio. There is back of the bluff a fine grove of trees in whose branches the birds sing her requiem all the day long.

This manuscript has been in the author's possession for some time. A few years ago he submitted it to a lady who was once a member of the Society of Friends and whose affiliations are all that way. She was a well-known newspaper woman of northeastern Pennsylvania, and her sister, Anne, was at one time the undisputed queen of the American lecture platform. Her only comment was, "How did you come to know about this? Abbie Flanner was my mother's most intimate friend and she visited her at Mount Pleasant a year before marrying my father."



FROM LEFT TO RIGHT: J. S. SHERIDAN, WALLACE MORGAN, H. DEVITT WELSH, H. D. ADAMS, C. D. GIBSON, F. D. CASEY, F. J. SHERIDAN, JR., ADOLPH TREIDLER, HARRY TOWNSEND, C. B. FALLS

A MEETING OF THE DIVISION OF PICTORIAL PUBLICITY, WITH CHARLES DANA GIBSON IN THE CHAIR

Brushes, Attention!

An Account of the American Artists' War Work and a Sprightly Meditation upon the Return of first-rate Art to the Subject of War.

MAKING POSTERS FIGHT

BY MONTROSE J. MOSES

AN ARTIST who ties himself up to a slogan these days is doing his bit in the Great War. No submarine, no aircraft, can upset an idea once it is safely launched in the popular mind by means of a poster. That is why the governments of all the allied countries have depended greatly upon art for propaganda, calling upon pens, brushes and pencils almost as urgently as they have called upon guns. When the history of the war is told in full, a large chapter will be that which will describe how it has been pictured by artists, not only in books, but on billboards, in street-cars, on the sides of public buildings, even in mural designs over the façades of treasury buildings. This is a war in which the regular commercial advertiser and lithographer can aid governments in exploiting the necessary *material* things. But it is also a war of Ideas, where things of the spirit have to be kept continually before the people. One must advertise sacrifice as one advertises food products. So, artists have been called in for something broader and more subtle than mere advertising. They must picture the sweeping emotions which have upheld an unbroken line before the onrush of the Hun; they must picture the psychology behind every demand made upon the public.

It was on April 27, 1917, that the artists mobilised, at the request of Mr. George Creel, Chairman of the Committee on Public Information. We are launching,—he told them,—a nation-wide campaign. The re-

motest regions will have to be reached with our appeals to their spirit of supreme sacrifice. There is not an official department in Washington which has not its message to get across to the American people. And as the war is prolonged, this message will take on new aspects, will have to be more insistent, will have to reflect more and more the changing phases of sentiment. It is you artists who must picture all this for the Government.

Brushes, Attention! called Charles Dana Gibson, who became chairman of the Division of Pictorial Publicity, and from that instant the American artists entered the war, quickly grasping the new demands made upon them, and unselfishly giving time and energy to the new problems confronting them. It was no casual art work they had to do. Accustomed, as many of them were, to embodying ideas contained in stories, articles and poems, in illustrations and paintings, they were now called upon to flood the country with posters which, through no other appeal than their own graphic portrayal, would stir a people to action, and put them on the instant into possession of the essential reasons for winning the war. No time would be given for experiments; while every artist would be encouraged, only the expert would execute. Here was an opportunity for discovering whatever art resources the country had. It is not a surprise that the foremost men in the profession should have in-