

BUDGETOctober 26, 1998

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A Lighter Side

You will no doubt notice that, in the quirky little paper to follow, the author liberally employs the third person singular. This is a literary device often used to make the author sound less all-fired self-impressed and egotistical. Also, if the paper turns out to be a dud, this can be blamed on the third person singular - not the author.

On the evening of June 1<sup>st</sup>, 1998, election night at The Literary Club, the author was far away en route to another great institution, his high school reunion, the sixtieth to be exact, in the hills of sunny southeast Tennessee. While, admittedly, his mind turned southward in anticipation of renewing old friendships, he confesses he had to restrain himself a couple times from making a long-distance phone call to the Board of Elections to see how the count was running. A note from a friend was awaiting him on his return later in the week congratulating him on his victory. He was much sobered and humbled, feeling that this was indeed an honor not to be taken lightly.

Admittedly it had not been an arduous campaign. At one point, remembering the name under which his predecessor had written his column in the Cincinnati Enquirer, he had considered using as his campaign slogan "From Mr. Whig to Mr. Know-Nothing." However, on further reflection, he remembered that the so-called

American or Know-Nothing Party had advocated a rather narrow-minded and bigoted point of view that hardly suggested the image he would like to project. So, he dropped the idea – with due apologies to former U.S. president Millard Fillmore whose whole political career could pretty well have been summarized by the rejected slogan: "From Mr. Whig to Mr. Know-Nothing."

In searching further for material that might either be suitable for an inaugural address or at least trigger a train of thought with some relevance to the occasion, he leafed through a bulging but dog-eared file entitled "James M. Alexander, Jr. Personal." Among the copies of boring resumes, yellowing newspaper clippings and other assorted potpourri (messy stuff – potpourri- to keep in a file folder!) nestled here and there he ran across scraps of paper with assorted nonsense scribbled thereon – a rhyme here, a slogan there that, though the prospect was pretty scary, might, if handled right, reveal a different and hopefully interesting side of the new president.

Had he been a better organizer, he might have had a separate subfile entitled "the OSD file" – OSD – Occasion Specific Doggerel. Prominent among those papers filed in the OSD file would have been one conceived largely while the author was mowing the lawn, as he remembers it, for the specific occasion of the fortieth birthday of his long-time friend, one Robert W. Hilton, Jr. Young Mr. Hilton had passed through his photography phase, was well into his hi-fi recording phase and still a number of years away from the all-encompassing Literary Club period of his life. So, it seemed appropriate to give him a phonograph record as a birthday present. A breezy fast-moving collection of show tunes was selected, its name to be revealed later, and the following accompanying jingle was read to the assembled celebrants at the surprise party Tiel had skillfully engineered. It may reveal to you what a shifty but lovable character we are dealing with.

Martin Luther was a fine old man  
 In the days of the Reformation.  
 As he quaffed his draft,  
 He quietly laughed  
 'bout the riddle of man's creation.

Young Robert Hilton,  
 Now come of age  
 At two score years and none,  
 Twisted up his face  
 In a wry grimace  
 And vowed he'd have a little fun!

When old Cotton Mather  
 Worked himself to a lather  
 O'er the behavior of his flock,  
 He was seen to repair  
 To the fields, where in prayer,  
 He watered his own live stock.

In the hovering gloom  
 Of the Court Record Room,  
 As he labored for Paxton and Vobiscum,  
 With a glance o'er his shoulder,  
 Robert grew a bit bolder  
 And entertained a thought quite promiscum.

After many a crisis  
 With the children of Isis,  
 Marc Antony, famed for his sword,  
 With a maid, svelte yet luscious,  
 Slipped off to the bullrushes  
 - - that is, whene'er he was bored.

With a glance apprehensive,  
 A shudder defensive,  
 And a hope the Recorder wouldn't barge in,  
 Bob chuckled with glee  
 As in book twenty-three,  
 He scratched a four-letter word in the margin!

When Premier Hatayama,  
 In a borrowed pajama  
 And fortified with a slug of hot sake,  
 Took a Japanese vow  
 That he'd ring Mitsu now  
 And have his fun too, by craki!

To cap off this day  
 In a riotous way  
 (and bursting with innermost tension)  
 As toward home he did wind,

Bob turned o'er in his mind  
A plan he daren't even mention.

The canal flowed with wine  
When the guests came to dine  
In the Medici palazzo so gorgeous.  
But Lucretia behaved  
In a way so depraved  
That to this day no one speaks to the  
Borgias!

Luck was with him today  
The family was away  
(otherwise his plans would be wrecked, you see)  
So he pulled down the shade,  
Mixed a stiff lemonade,  
And listened to his new record, "ECSTASY"!

Other bits of verse would have been filed in that  
OSD folder. Several were related to the retirement of  
colleagues at the University. One, dated January,  
1956, was composed on the occasion of the retirement to  
Florida of Miss Bess Houston [Howston], the librarian  
of the then College of Applied Arts – or should it have  
been Houston [Hooston]? With a librarian that  
pronounced library liberry one could never be sure.  
The little tribute follows:

As you bask in the sun  
Sipping a grapefruit  
To the tune of a tropical breeze,  
We hope you'll remember  
Poor us in December  
Shivering up here in the freeze

As we pay through the stacks  
Lying flat on our backs  
Looking for Sir Bannister Fletcher,  
We're in such a mess  
Been so spoiled by Bess  
Won't someone please go down and fetch her.

We'll just have to learn  
No longer to turn  
To Bess for details infinitesimal,  
Get over feeling shook up

Having to look our own book up  
And fathoming the dread Dewey Decimal.

So farewell then, dear friend  
Many years may you spend  
In repose on your southernmost latitudes,  
But take with you there  
Our best wishes to share  
In the spirit of St. Matthew's beatitudes.

(Yes, Bess was truly one of the Meek.)

Then there was the retirement in 1988 of Mary Lillie – first, Secretary to the Dean and later, Assistant Dean, Administration. She was one of those people about whom you were sure that the place would fall apart if they ever retired. After over twenty-five years service she did step down with plans to move back home to upstate New York and engage in the business of buying and selling antiques. This one is entitled: "Hail Mary!"

Come sit by my side, little darling,  
And look at these old photographs  
Of teachers and students and all kind of folk  
And, yes, even administrative staffs.

Like the march to the ark they are coming,  
Like a herd, dear, of ancient giraffes  
To pay tribute to Mary, two by two they arrive  
They – and their better halves.

Bye, bye, American Pie  
And a host of more suitable phrases  
Are on each person's lips as loudly they cry  
And give vent to their innermost praises.

High above Cayuga's water –  
Plus sixty-two miles to the east,  
Sit Mary and Parker in glowing attire  
Enjoying their retirement feast.

To the hordes of well-wishers – be they old,  
young, or boomers  
They say, "Do drop in for a visit!"

Just bring an antique, and you can be roomers,  
Ain't that a deal - or is it?

Speaking again of Mary, also to be found in the file is a carbon copy of a University requisition form dated January 15, 1965. The author remembers that the original was sent to Mary at Holmes Hospital where she had recently undergone minor surgery. At that time the author was co-director of a group doing research and development for the Air Force, our Air Force, in the area of light-weight, reusable, air-transportable shelter systems. Instead of a list of items being ordered, the body of the requisition contained the following little rhyme:

Though a stupid requisition  
Must seem quite an imposition  
At this point in your transition  
From a lateral position,

The status of our nation  
Does impose the obligation  
to give all for the duration.  
Hence, this formal application  
for a purchase order number.

As you sit in your seclusion,  
May this impolite intrusion  
Remind you of your exclusion  
From the DAA confusion.

Though we struggle on so wary  
Without our secretary  
We all love and miss you, Mary  
In this month of January  
as we did in old Decumber.

As would be expected in the case of such a dedicated family man as the author claims to be, a certain percentage of the versifying would be family directed or based on family events. One sheet found in the file is a copy of a letter sent to his three children living at the time one each in Asheville, Indianapolis, and Washington, D.C. He doesn't remember what prompted the writing of it really - or why the preoccupation with sex! From the letter:

"On our walk last night Bert" (the family dog\*) and composed a little song. I won't call it a hymn of Thanksgiving, but it is based on the tune of an old hymn that I recall from childhood. The only words I remember were the two lines: "Love divine all love excelling" and "Change from glory into glory". I polished off some rough edges while taking my morning shower - and here is the result:

Dogs divine, all dogs excelling,  
 Pure and sexless let them be.  
 Boomer, Buffer, Bert and Barney  
 They'll go down in history!

Change from female into neuter,  
 Male dogs too shall neuter be.  
 Only God can make little puppies,  
 And boy is that okay with me!

I'll sing it for you when you're home for Christmas.  
 Love, Dad"

And one involving the whole family: One Christmas season, probably sometime in the 1960's, my wife's mother, recently widowed, moved into one of those old brick apartment houses in the Clifton-Ludlow part of town. The apartment was very spacious, had ten or twelve foot ceilings, and the heating system performed adequately. It was lacking, however, some of the important little amenities like, for instance, adequate shelves in the kitchen. While Mama was away in New York visiting her other daughter, the family decided to at least do something about this particular deficiency. Their efforts are described in the following bit of plagiarism:

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\*Bert was a loping medium large St. Bernard/Collie, a graduate of the SPCA, the dog poind - not the SCPA. His fullname was Bert Backtrack, but he also answered to Engelbert Humperdog.

'Twas the night before Christmas, the magic hour,  
 Not a creature was stirring, not even a Lehenbauer  
 (they lived downstairs)  
 The pots are all hung on their hooks with care  
 In hope that dear Mama soon will be there.

The pots are hung on some brand new shelves  
 Put there by the Christmas elves.

For I with my hammer, and Petty with her brush  
 Had put them together in a very great rush.  
 Had pounded and sawed and raised such a clatter  
 Down came Dickie in his nighters to see what was  
 the matter.

And when we had finished, Santa's helpers all five  
 To the Romaine in Clifton across the snow we did  
 drive,  
 And laying my finger aside of my nose,  
 Holding on tight, up the stairway I rose.

Now Revere wear, now Cannister, now Bucket for  
 ice,  
 On Salt Cellar, on Nutmeg, On Sugar and Spice  
 To the top of the shelf, fastened tight to the  
 wall  
 Now dash away, dash away, dash away all.

We sprang to the Plymouth, we five Christmas elves  
 And headed back home, quite proud of ourselves.  
 But we were heard to exclaim, as we drove out of  
 sight  
 "Merry Christmas, dear Mama, we miss you tonight!"

At this point the gleanings from the file settle  
 down to assorted jottings on a variety of topics.

The author enjoys creating names for new products,  
 and slogans or even singing commercials for marketing  
 them. Here are a couple:

As if a new southern cola is needed: Pensa-Cola.  
 Pensa-Cola is the drink for you! (that's getting pretty  
 close to plagiarism, isn't it?)



How about a Playtex Living Bib for the very young set?

Or a doughnut, made with potato flour, called a Spudnut and, if the former mayor of Indianapolis bearing the name is interested: Spudnuts by Hudnut?

Popular songs, or once-popular songs, provide intriguing possibilities for modification. A good first line: "Come to me my alcoholic baby" and a good last line: "cause I may be an alcoholic too!" The lines in between don't come so easily.

- or, with apologies to Leonardo da Vinci:  
"Mogasdiscio, Mogasdiscio, men have loved you!"

One with slightly political/cultural overtones – of the seventies it would seem: "Momma don't 'llow no guitar playing in here". Response: "yes, but Pompidou!"

- or that old Vietnamese folk song: "Hué, down upon the Perfume River" by Stephen Foster Dulles. Dulles?

Ah yes – before I forget, oops, before he forgets: here's one with real Literary Club relevance. It's an old English hunting song.

Do you ken John Diehl with his coat so gay,  
Do you ken John Diehl at the break of day,  
Do you ken John Diehl when he's far far away  
With the fox and the hounds in the morning."

What's that you say, Mr. Secretary? Yes, I know that business about everyone being destined to get fifteen minutes of fame. You say that I've had mine, such as it is, in fact that I've run over my time by a couple minutes? Very well, I guess this can stop here

as well as any place. Thank you for listening. . .and  
may God bless the Literary Club.

James M. Alexander

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### Veritas

Following decades-old Anniversary Meeting tradition, the historian comes again with a short paper about another facet of the rich lore of the Club-Past. This evening I will tell you the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth about Veritas. You've seen the brightly-colored, round window, bearing the crest of Harvard College, on the north wall of our library. You've possibly been curious about its history. Where is it from? How did it get here? Why do we have it? My story tonight, I hope will answer those questions.

The window once adorned the old Appleton Chapel at Harvard. It was given to us by Mrs. Everard Jack Appleton in memory of her husband. Jack Appleton was a much-loved member of the Literary Club from 1908 until the onset of a serious, crippling illness in 1920 prevented his further attendance at meetings. During active membership, he wrote eighteen papers, several of them poetry, for which he had a special gift.

First, a bit of Appleton/Harvard background. The Appletons came to America in the early 17<sup>th</sup> century and had a long association with Harvard. Samuel Appleton, the first of the family to leave England and settle in the New World, married Judith Everard, from whom Jack got his first name, E.v.e.r.a.r.d. He didn't particularly like it. He said "it sounded more like a breakfast cereal than a man's name. I wish people would lay off putting h's in the middle and t's on the end".

Samuel Appleton's son, John, married Priscilla Glover, daughter of Jose Glover who brought the first printing press to America. John and Priscilla's son, John, born in 1652, married Elizabeth Rogers, a daughter of Rev. John Rogers, the fifth president of Harvard. Their son, Nathaniel, born December 9<sup>th</sup> 1689, graduated from Harvard in 1712, the second man to be awarded a Doctor of divinity degree there (Increase Mather, Cotton Mather's brother was the first). Nathaniel's son, John, was graduated from Harvard as was his son, John Sparhawk Appleton. John Sparhawk Appleton's son, also John, (Obviously John was a favorite name in the Appleton family) was a graduate of the Harvard Medical School. His son, John W. Appleton, our Jack's father, dropped out of Harvard Medical School at the time of the Civil War. He served with Shaw's famous 5<sup>th</sup> Massachusetts Regiment. By the end of the war, he had attained the rank of Brigadier General. Jack, himself, broke the long line and did not attend Harvard. Despite the fact that, by tradition, as the eldest son of the eldest son of alumni he was eligible for a scholarship of some sort, his father felt he didn't have the means to send him through.

There were strong Appleton ties with Harvard in addition to the Appletons who were students there. In 1786 the trustees bought the Appleton pasture which became part of the Harvard Yard. In 1854, under the terms of his will, Samuel Appleton, Jack's great uncle and a successful merchant in Boston, bequeathed to Harvard the then tremendous gift of \$200,000. It was probably the largest single donation the college received up to that time. A few figures will reveal the tight financial situation at Harvard in the early and mid-nineteenth century. The total operating budget for the year 1809-10 was \$35,000, up to \$83,000 by 1820. From 1810 to 1821 the value of 'college stock' or endowment had dropped from \$149,000 to a measly \$67,000. So, Samuel's gift, only thirty odd years later, was a real financial boost. His executors designated \$50,000, later raised to \$68,000, to build what was to become Appleton Chapel, which included our window.

In what appears to have been an architectural competition, five architects submitted drawings for the chapel in 1855. Those of Paul Schultz were chosen. The chapel was built in 1856. Bainbridge Bunting, in his book, Harvard An Architectural History - 1985, writes, "Visually, Appleton Chapel stood apart from other buildings in the Yard by reason of its light Nova Scotia sandstone, which differed from the granite and brick employed elsewhere. Its architectural style was an ungainly mixture of Classical and Romanesque, an ambivalence that caused some to observe that 'it had no style'." Charles Wagner, in his Harvard - Four Centuries and Freedoms - 1950, writes about forthright Professor Charles Eliot Norton, founder and head of the fine arts department at Harvard in the 1890s: "Norton's chief concern for Harvard was the paucity of a unifying and meaningful architecture." He continues with a story that circulated on campus of Norton's entering heaven and being asked by St. Peter how he liked the celestial architecture. Norton replied, "It's ornate but consistent. You'd appreciate it too if you'd had to look at Appleton Chapel all your life."

Despite its architectural incongruities, Appleton chapel was a cherished building in the Yard. Our old member, Murray Seasongood who knew it well when he was

at Harvard spoke very lovingly of it. It was remodeled in 1872 with the addition of a gallery to increase the seating capacity to 900. Commencement exercises were held there from 1872 to 1876. It was finally razed in 1931, except for a token remnant that became part of the new Memorial Church in the Yard. That is the year Jack Appleton died and that is when Mrs. Appleton, after writing to Harvard President Lowell about the Appleton connection, received by express a large crate marked 'Harvard Crest'. I'm sure she didn't know quite what to do with it. It would be a rather ungainly ornament for a residence. She decided to offer it to the Literary Club and to pay for its installation-in memory of Jack.

Her offer was considered at the meeting of December 7, 1931. There is no record in the minutes about the debate that ensued, but I'm quite sure there was some discussion. How would the Club use the gift? We couldn't defile the clean architectural lines of our handsome, Federal, 1820s building by installing a round, stained-glass window in one of its outside walls. It would hardly be appropriate as a wall hanging. Architect member, Alfred Elzner, who designed the room we're seated in tonight, resolved the problem. He suggested an ingenious solution. Install the window in the inside north wall of the library above the book cases and bring out all of its brilliant color by illuminating it from the cloak-room. The minutes go on to say "On motion duly seconded, the club unanimously accepted the donation and instructed Mr. Elzner to attend to the installation as he had kindly volunteered to do, and the Secretary to write Mrs. Appleton a letter of thanks".

Formal acceptance of the window took place on the evening of Monday January 18, 1932. It proved to be a most notable meeting. Mrs. Appleton was there. Although there had been special Ladies Meetings a few times in the 1890s, this was the first and only regular meeting in the 149-year history of the Club at which a woman was present.

In the unavoidable absence of President Simeon Johnson, Vice President, Murray Seasongood presided at the meeting. He spoke of the Appleton Chapel at

Harvard and of the great spiritual refreshment which Harvard men had received in his day from attending the meetings there. He then called upon Mr. Elzner who acted as a sort of master-of-ceremonies. The minutes recount that he gave, "a short account of Jack Appleton's life and of his extraordinary courage and cheerfulness as he lay a helpless invalid for the past ten or twelve years, often suffering great pain. His poems were known and admired all over the country and his fellow members of the Literary Club often came to him to be cheered by his courageous cheerfulness".

Mr. Elzner read from a letter Jack had written to a friend shortly before he died: "When my mental and spiritual poise is still on straight, though the physical is always off center, and as long as my head is still functioning as usual-far be it from me to kick. When I have so many things to be downright grateful for-what of it if seas of pain swamp me now and then? Really it doesn't matter. I'd be ashamed not to try at least to live up to my standards. In life it is up to us to live with our minds and souls and spirits utterly alive. Self-pity is a deadly sin; may I never be guilty of it is the prayer of yours-to the end."

Mr. Elzner then read a resolution of sorrow and praise for Jack passed by the Cincinnati MacDowell Society of which he was a founding member. He went on to quote from the obituary Jack's colleague at the Times-Star, Lew Heck, had written: "-There are many men in this city who, when sick at heart, despondent, aching in body, went to the bedside of Jack Appleton to be cheered, to be comforted by his wisdom and - more precious, the sunshine of his great mind and heart. -That sort of contagious sunshine is God's gift obtainable only through such of His elect as Jack Appleton consistently was. -In health and throughout his life as an active newspaper man of the top class, Appleton was an optimist both as a writer and in his contacts with people. His life was tuned to a note of unquenchable cheerfulness. Probably no Cincinnati Newspaper writer has a place in so many scrapbooks-". Mr. Elzner then read two of Jack's poems-one entitled "Steadfast", the other "Courage".

Mrs. Appleton was introduced. Not realizing she would be invited to attend the meeting, she read from a letter she had prepared for the occasion. She reviewed the Appleton genealogy and Harvard connection as outlined above. She told about Jack's cheerful optimism. She told about the radio Literary Club friends had given him - a five-dial set, no doubt powerful for the 1930s. "Over that radio," she said, "he heard his poems and humorous jingles read not only locally but from New York many times, Chicago, and once late at night from a California station. Wasn't I happy and in luck that night?"

The meeting ended on a musical note. Albert Mathews, the secretary recorded that - a "Mr. Beddoe sang two very beautiful songs in a voice as fresh and strong as that of a man half his age. Those who were present will never forget the occasion; and the club is deeply indebted to Mr. Elzner for arranging so appropriate a service and for reading to us two of Appleton's tender and inspiring poems."

So, why do we have the window? Despite the fact that we've almost always had a small loyal contingent of Harvard men on our roster, Veritas is not necessarily a monument to Harvard. It's a memento of the Group of considerate, gentlemanly members who rescued a grieving widow from what might have been a burdensome White Elephant and to Alfred Elzner who cleverly changed that White Elephant into an attractive adornment for our library. It's a reminder of Susan Avery Appleton, the only woman ever to attend a regular meeting of the Literary Club in its century-and-a-half history. But most of all, it's a memorial to Jack Appleton-not so much for his association with the club, which was of relatively short duration-as for his wonderful spirit, optimism, cheerfulness and courage that came into most spectacular bloom through his suffering. He was a truly remarkable man who inspired all who had the good fortune to know him.

John Diehl

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