

The Sentinel

A Weekly Newspaper With Plenty of Backbone

Elbert Bede and Elbert Smith Publishers
Elbert Bede, Editor

A first-class publication entered at Cottage Grove, Ore., as second-class matter

Business Office: 412 East Main

SUBSCRIPTION RATES
One year—\$2.00 Three months—50c
Six months—1.00 Single copy—5c
No subscription listed for less than 50c

Member of
National Editorial Association
Oregon State Editorial Association
Oregon Newspaper Conference
Willamette Valley Editorial Association
Lane County Publishers' Association

FRIDAY, MARCH 19, 1920.

TRUTH AND POSSIBLE FICTION STRANGELY MIXED IN STORY

(Continued from first page.)

things that took place before that name was taken from it.

There is so much in the diary that is known to be fact and so much that might be pure fiction that the correct solution only seems further away as the investigation into the mystery progresses. The place where the road goes three ways is still there; the lane that went to the house on the hill is still there; the girl "without seeing" is identified; the Sadie McKenzie is identified. All of these events must have taken place, if they took place at all, not over 16 years ago, yet the Jean and Larry, whom God furnished a baby on such short notice, can not be identified; those who lived at the time and around the place where Jean and Larry are supposed to have lived, can place no such persons, the Uncle Caleb and Rob Ryder are equally mythical persons so far as those who have known every person who ever has lived in that vicinity are able to recall. Michael Angelo Sazio Raphael, the fir tree with an understanding soul, can not be identified. Not even a stump of such a tree can be found near the old barn which still stands. None remember such a tree. Fact and fiction seem strangely mixed, but one is told with the same embellishments of plausibility as the others.

How much is fact and how much is not?

Why does she not remember her former name, although she had arrived at an age when it would seem that one so precocious could not so quickly forget something so important now?

Why is not the story of the substitution told in the diary, or do the references to THE mamma, THE papa, THE grandma, THE Uncle Caleb infer that they were not of her blood?

If there has been a substitution, how remarkable that at the moment of the death of a daughter another of the same age should have appeared bearing all the characteristics of a child of the family, one having the same precocity for writing, one having the same inquisitiveness for exact details of every little event that the father remembers in the other child.

On the other hand, where did those copy books, which had such an influence on her life, some from? Why have they so mysteriously disappeared? Are they and their disappearance pure fabrication? How are we to account for the fact that this fantasy, known to have existed several years ago, has been carried over past the adolescent age, when all other children with a similar fantasy have dropped it?

Has Atlantic Monthly Been Spoofed?

We who know Opal well, who know the innocently sincere way in which she tells her stories, who know of her deeply religious nature, who know of her love for God and his great outdoors, who have often seen the face to which deceit and hypocrisy would seem strange companions, can easily understand why the editor of Atlantic Monthly would believe whatever may have been told him when, as the editor himself says, he drew out the foster-parent story and the fact of the existence of the diary on an occasion when their author came to see him on an entirely different mission. Plainly the author had no intent to capitalize this alleged incident in her life; plainly she had never thought of using the diary to gain the literary fame which she

craved, to get inside the covers of Atlantic, a longing which every author has. In the pleasant relations that followed while the diary was being pieced together in order that its value as a literary document might be judged, a friendship ripened, there was a mutual meetings of minds and souls. The stage could not have been purposely and studiously better set for the reception without question by even so scholarly a man, so expert a judge of human nature, as the editor of Atlantic, of the story Opal told.

The idea that Opal has but recently invented the foster-parent theory for literary purposes is as untenable as the charge that the staid and respectable old Atlantic has done something of that sort. No person familiar with Atlantic thinks such a piece of deceit could come from it. None who know Opal well doubts her sincerity in her claims. Her relatives, her father, see such an idea.

Is it not possible that Atlantic had what it deemed more positive proof of the foster-parent claim than any presented in Opal's own introduction? Such proof might as easily be explained away as some of the other statements that seem untenable, yet it is probable that such proof is not only such as to explain why this fancy of Opal's, if such it is, has remained with her past the age when others have dropped it, but also sufficient to convince Atlantic that there was no need to investigate the statements made by one so apparently sincere as Opal and apparently so incapable of deceit or hypocrisy. Perhaps the storm which has risen may result in the presentation of this contributory proof of this strange tale if there is such contributory proof. Atlantic, it would seem, owes that much to its readers. Opal, it would seem, owes that much to her many friends who maintain that what she says is fact as far as her own belief goes.

Was Diary Written at Age of Six?

While there are many to scoff at the claim that so much of the diary as has been printed is the literary effort of a child of six, there are many incidents to make this claim seem much more than probable.

It would seem unlikely that a child of that age could spend so much time in writing and still keep her literary efforts hidden from her parents; it would seem unlikely that a child of that age would be so secretive; but parent, relatives and friends remember that Opal was not an ordinary child; there are those who knew her in her babyhood who say she was a very odd youngster; that at the age of six she talked like a grownup; that she had few companions.

I have found no one who ever saw the diary, but it is remembered that the child spent much time in forming words and in writing. Even at the age of three the one whom we may positively call the real Opal could tell most of the letters and could form words from a copy book. As the other children grew older they learned that Opal kept a diary, but none were permitted to see it except as the author read to them from it. There is, therefore, no positive proof that the diary being printed is the one written by six-year-old Opal, but Atlantic Monthly's editor should be a good judge and he has accepted it as such. That page of the diary of which a facsimile has been published certainly indicates the work of a child of very tender years. Being printed in capital letters would indicate that it was written before the child learned to make pot-books, and she started to school at six. Any who believe that Opal in later years, during the time she was cramming her head with her lore of the great outdoors, took time to write 150,000 words (which Atlantic says the diary contains) and in doing so to imitate the painful and labored print of a child, to imitate the oddly misspelled words and peculiarly twisted English, probably are wasting their time in some prosaic occupation when they should be writing the best sellers in fiction.

If the diary was polished up in later years, why such words still remaining as "screwteyeyes," "new monia," "rownd," "wood" for would, "dus" for does, and "wus" for was, while such words as "untangle" and "silk-on" are correctly spelled.

Even after reading Opal's introduction, in which she says that she got the names for her pets from the two copy books "given her by her angel parents," all still ask "Where did she get those words?" "Where did she

get the names of those four obscure French rivers?" Some are inclined to believe that they were put in after Opal attended the university. As the idea of publication of the diary presumably never occurred to Opal until it was suggested by the editor of Atlantic, there seems to be no object for the alleged interjections into the diary, but aside from this it is pretty certain that the diary had been torn into bits before Opal became a university student.

Many here advance the theory that the spelling was accidental, but if not accidental, she refers to her friends Jean and Larry, evidently names of French derivation, it is not impossible that one or the other helped her with her spelling. Again, Opal says in her diary that she got many things out of the two mysterious copybooks. If they contained so many of the things which she used in her diary, why may they not have contained these French words? The author admits that high-sounding words had for her a peculiar charm. "Comparer" and "riviere" may have been found there and may have made the same impression as did "screwteyeyes" when used by the school teacher, at which time she made the mental note, "It does have such an interest sound. I think I will have uses for it." That the use of French words came to her because of French ancestry is thought here to be hardly tenable.

It is easy to believe that had the diary been written in later years, with the idea of giving it publicity, things that might cast doubt upon its precocious authorship would have been omitted.

The precociousness indicated through the diary, if really written at the tender age of six, is not so particularly out of the ordinary. Many children can write intelligently at that age, let alone print. Many can form words and know their a, b, c's before that tender age. Prodigies there have been, and many of them, who have attained, in other lines, the intelligence that must be given the six-year-old Opal if we concede the diary to have been started at that age. Her diary, supposed to have been written at the age of six, is no more wonderful than her book, "The Fairyland Around Us," known to have been written by her before the age of 20, a book which has won the wondering admiration of kings and queens, presidents, statesmen, scholars, church dignitaries of the highest rank, great editors who have hesitated not to express their appreciation in writing.

This diary, if written at the age of six, is no more wonderful than her collection of 20,000 or more specimens of rocks, flowers, ferns, moths, beetles, butterflies, birds, bird homes, sea shells, etc., known to have attained that proportion at the age of 17, together with her apparent familiarity with the history of each one of her specimens. Caterpillars were collected almost by the barrel and chrysalis by the thousands.

The wonder caused by such a diary written at such an age is no greater than the astonishment of bald-pated professors when this little outdoor fairy knocked at the doors of the University of Oregon and was almost refused admission because she had not the necessary textbook learning. A newspaper story printed at the time contained the following:

"Tutored by nature, a tiny 17-year-old mountaineer girl, her hair down her back, has opened the eyes of the Eugene teaching profession and left it gasping for breath. Educated by herself in the forests of the Cascade mountains, she has made a college education appear artificial and insignificant, university professors admit. In three days she became the talk of the faculties of three educational institutions. Entrance rules have been cast aside; scholarships are proposed; a home was found for her in Eugene—everything has been done to keep her here.

"This experience happens to a university but once in a generation," declared Warren D. Smith, head of the university geological department. She knows more about geology than do many students that have graduated from my department. She may become one of the greatest minds Oregon has ever produced. She will be an investment for the university."

"She is a travesty on our educational system," explained A. R. Sweetser, head of the botany department. "Is all our great system wasted; is it hindering normal development?"

It is not the presumption that at six years Opal was able to form sentences and record her thoughts that causes wonder. Many who never will be recorded in history as prodigies have done that. The wonderful part of the diary is the simple and fascinating manner in which trivial events are given an interest far beyond that to which they seem entitled and in the revealing of an understanding soul in a child of such tender years.

Opal's Sincerity.

One of the most inexplicable phases of the odd story of Opal is how one who loved God's great out-of-doors, one in whom a phrenologic reading a number of years ago showed a super-development of the spiritual and moral, as well as the same super-development of the mental and love of literature, one of a marked affectionate disposition, one who is known to have felt her filial responsibility to the Whiteleys, regardless of how she may have regarded her parentage, one who loved art, music, poetry, drama, biography, zoology, astronomy and all the nobler, better and higher things of life, one who has dedicated her life to bringing joy and gladness to others, could do anything to bring pain and sorrow to those whom she must love and who love her.

That she has done this despite a mental development that would turn her from doing a wrong or the slightest injury to God's most lowly creature, despite a mental development that would force her to turn from intentional defaming of one whose life on earth meant much to her, is the best possible proof that Opal is sincere in her claims. Her nature, as we have come in contact with that nature, would make it impossible for her to sell her soul even for the literary fame that her story has brought her. It is my opinion that she believes this. It is my opinion that she believes that those who held dear already know the story she tells and that she does not realize

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that she has caused broken hearts and shedding of tears. From the newspaper accounts so far published, those inclined to believe the Whiteley parentage, may remain doubtful because unable to explain the peculiar talents of the child. If we doubt that the One who made the heavens and the earth, the waters and all that in them is, if we doubt that the One who placed the planets in the firmament and made them to demonstrate their various revolutions; if we doubt that the One who conceived man and gave him woman, would not evade the laws of his own making and give a child of his kind to parents entirely dissimilar in nature, which the newspaper accounts so far published would indicate has been the case, we need not despair, for the mother was a woman of refinement, a graduate of a normal school, and the father is not by any means the backwoodsman that it pleases the newspapers to make him appear.

If this peculiar talent must come from heredity, we find in a newspaper story under date of March 10, 1915, the following statement: "She (Opal) attributes much of her interest in newspaper minor, who died last year. He used to tell me of nature and now, though he's dead, his thoughts can live on, because I'm learning those things he wanted me to learn." The uncle referred to, who possibly may be "the uncle Caleb" of the diary, was a brother of the Grandmother Scott, mother of Mrs. Whiteley.

Stanley, the second of Opal's given names, is that of a grandparent through the Whiteleys. It is not known that this name is in any way connected with that of the great English explorer, but it would not be surprising to find such to be the case.

If we can not believe that such a mind can come from parents such as have been described we may find that those parents have been misrepresented. If we can not believe that the spirit of the uncle who is gone is directing the footsteps and mind of the niece he left behind, it is possible that the exponents of the Whiteley parentage can find heredity even closer than that of the uncle and grandparents.

Phrenologic Reading.

The following phrenologic reading was made for Miss Opal Whiteley September 3, 1915, by Mrs. Jenn Morris Ellis, noted character analyst and now engaged in the educational work of the Y. M. C. A.

Adaptation in business: Assayer, botanist, chemist, geologist, artistic lecturer, sculptor, author, linguist, novelist, orator, poet, scientist. All of these are under the general heads of scientific, artistic and literary.

Degrees of strength considered in the scale of 7 (7 being the highest mark obtainable): Organic quality, 6½; health, 6; motive temperament, 4½; vital temperament, 5; circulatory power, 5; breathing power, 6; mental temperament, 6; activity, 7; excitability, 5; size of brain, 6 (21.5-24); vitality, 6; courage, 6; executive power, 6; appetite, 5½; biacity, 6; acquisitiveness, 5; secretiveness, 5; amative-ness, 6; conjugality, 7; parental love,

7; friendship, 7; inabittiveness (love of home and country) 7; caution, 5; approbation, 6; self-reliance, 6; firmness, 6; continuity, 6; constructiveness, 6; ideality, 7; sublimity, 7; imitation, 5; mirthfulness, 5; agreeableness, 6; human nature, 5; individuality, 7; form, 6; size (perception of magnitude, etc.) 7; weight (perception of law of gravity, etc.) 7; color (perception of), 6½; order, 5; calculation, 6; locality (perception and memory of places), 7; memory of events, 7; time, 6; tune, 6; language, 6¼; casualty, 6; power to

compare, 7; conscience, 6; hope, 6; spirituality, 7; veneration, 6; kindness, 6½.

I attempt to make no deductions from the facts presented, but I think the claim may be successfully made that any solution of the mystery of Opal, her parentage and her diary would be as strange and almost as unbelievable as it would be to find Opal's story proved by incontrovertible fact.

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