

What Is Fame?



Drawing by Ray Walters.

By ELMO SCOTT WATSON



WHAT is fame? The dictionary, the court of last resort in questions of definition, says it is "renown," "celebrity," "that which causes one's name to be remembered." And in that last synonym lies the joker. For Fame is a capricious goddess who often loves to trick those whom she elevates to a position of distinction. Often she gives generously with one hand and with the other suddenly takes her gift away. She promises that men's names will not be forgotten. So they, poor fools, burn out their lives to win "renown." And then they learn that the joke's on them. Their names are remembered but they themselves are forgotten!

Scientists, inventors and the like seem to be her favorite dupes. In this electrical age, and especially in these days of almost universal use of the radio, everyone uses the terms "watt," "volt," "ohm" and "ampere," but how many of us know anything about James Watt of Scotland, Count Alessandro Volta of Italy, George Simon Ohm of Germany or Andre Marie Ampere of France? At least, their names survive in these common words even if they themselves are forgotten, but how about that modern Prometheus who made it possible for us to do away with the clumsy, old-fashioned method of starting a fire with flint and steel? How many persons can name the man who invented the modern match? Very few, probably.

Yet it was only ninety years ago that Janos Irinyi, a Hungarian analytical chemist, was successful where his professor had failed and by using phosphorus instead of sulphur, produced a match that flared satisfactorily. He sold his invention for about \$30. In 1846 he founded a match factory and seemed to be on the road to great wealth. Then the Hungarian revolution two years later stopped his work. He died in poverty in 1895.

We cherish the silhouettes of our ancestors as precious heirlooms because, unless our forefathers were wealthy enough to have their portraits painted, these silhouettes are the only things which give us any idea of how they looked. But we know nothing at all about Etienne de Silhouette, a French minister of finance, except that somewhere we may have heard that he had a reputation for stinginess. We cherish also those old daguerreotypes of our grandparents or great-grandparents, which tell us even better than

does a silhouette how they looked. But do we ever think of M. Daguerre, the Frenchman, who in 1839 gave to the world this first form of modern photography as we now know it? Not much!

When it rains we slip on a mackintosh, but we're not likely to stop even for a moment to be grateful to Charles Mackintosh of Manchester, England, whose invention of waterproof cloth makes it possible for us to keep dry. We motor smoothly over macadam roads with never a thought for John Loudon Macadam, who won fame (?) as a road engineer in Scotland. Along the way, we stop for a sandwich at some roadside stand, because like the Earl of Sandwich we want a light lunch which can be eaten with comfort as well as speed. If something goes wrong with the car, we open the tool box and perhaps take out a stillson wrench to fix it. (Yes, a man named Stillson invented this handy tool. But who was he, anyway?)

And so it goes. On long railroad journeys we ride in comfort in Pullman cars and it's doubtful if we ever give a thought to George Mortimer Pullman, the New York cabinetmaker who first transformed an old day coach into the first sleeping car. We may have a mansard roof on our house but we don't know that it's called that because a French architect named Mansard helped circumvent an old Paris law that tried to limit the height of houses by specifying the distance from the ground at which all roofs should begin.

Nor is the caprice of Fame confined to those to whom we should be most grateful because they have given us useful or indispensable articles of every-day use. Did you ever say "I certainly am going to hand him a wallop!" "Wallop" is a perfectly good word in the English language and familiar to everyone. But who remembers now a certain Sir John Wallop, a British general who inflicted so many defeats upon the French that "Let's Wallop them!" became a by-word in England?

If you ever have to "take a ride in the Black Maria" it may be some comfort to you to meditate upon the thought that you know why it's so-called and that the policeman who arrested you doesn't. So on the way to the station you might entertain him with the following historical facts: In the old colonial days, Maria Lee, a negress, kept a sailor's boarding house in Boston. A woman of great stature and strength, she not only had the whole lawless element of her part of town in awe of her, but she also helped

the authorities keep the peace. It is said that at one time she, unassisted, took three riotous sailors to the lock-up and whenever a particularly troublesome person was to be subdued everybody immediately said "send for Black Maria." So it appears that she was not one to "let George do it." In that respect she was different from Louis XII of France. Although himself a strong ruler he was fortunate in having a prime minister who was a clever executive and an able manager. Georges d'Ambiose was his name and as Louis learned more and more to depend upon him to perform disagreeable tasks, more and more was the sovereign of France given to saying "Que Georges le fasse" (Let George do it!)

Try this sentence on your neighbor: "When a man in defiance of the bore dry laws gets filled up with gin rickies he's likely to get reckless and let 'er go gallagher." He probably will understand what you mean, all right. But ask him who was Bone and Rickey and Gallagher! If he can't answer, tell him this: John Bone was formerly sheriff of Chilpeewa county, Mich., and through rigid enforcement of the early liquor laws in that state made his county extremely arid. So when the legislature passed the next anti-liquor law it was named the Bone Dry bill. Col. Joseph K. Rickey of Fulton, Mo., invented the drink called a gin rickey. Gallagher (first name unknown) was city marshal of Harrodsburg, Ky. During a race meeting in Tipton county he was the driver of a fast trotting mare, entered in a race by Judge Beaver of Morgan county, which was looked upon as a certain winner. But some of the sporting fraternity, hoping to catch the judge unaware, imported a famous fast trotter and entered the horse in the race. At the end of the first half mile, the two horses came down the stretch, neck and neck, whereupon the judge shouted "Let 'er go, Gallagher!" Gallagher loosed the reins, the mare rushed forward and won the race by a dozen lengths.

What is fame? Judging from all these examples fame is a name and nothing more. Personified Fame is the goddess of caprice. She promises men that their names will not be forgotten and they think she is promising them that THEY will not be forgotten. Or she may be the goddess of jokes. Our children's children and their children after them may be riding around in a ford and to them Henry will be just a common man's name. For Fame loves her little joke—even a Ford joke.

THE DRIED APPLE CHEST

(© by D. J. Walsh.)

ELIZA CURRY sat writing a letter. She had taken the materials from a quaint wooden box that sat before her upon the sitting-room table—sheets of faintly-tinted paper, a stick of blue wax, a quaint pen that, dipped in a glass of water, rewarded one with a flow of mauve ink. She wrote slowly in a fine slanting hand with little curlicues on her g's and p's and f's. And she wrote painfully, for never in all her life had she anything more unpleasant to do than writing this letter to her nephew's widow, Lila Canfield.

Eliza was old and tiny with white hair wound in a sleek little knot, a mouth like a wilted pink and dark eyes which had once held a "come-follow-me" look so irresistible that she had scarcely been able to count her beaus on the fingers of both hands. But she, as so often happens, had married the poor stick of the lot, Fergus Curry—because she loved him. And that love had weathered the vicissitudes of a difficult married experience which had terminated several years before in Fergus' death.

During the years of her widowhood Eliza had "managed." She had her tiny white house and a little money which she had made last until the present moment. Now that it was gone she must sell her house. Indeed, the bargain was all but made with possession to be given immediately. In a week, more or less, Eliza would be leaving the house to which she had come as Fergus' bride, the house where her three children had been born and had died one after the other, the house where Fergus had closed his wild, bright eyes, the house where she herself had hoped to die. Her nephew's widow, Lila Canfield, offered her a home and she was going there. She was writing to say that just as soon as she could get things in shape she would come.

The spring sun came in at the windows hotly, and as Eliza wrote she was conscious of a faint odor all through the house which came not from her pot-pourri jar, for that was closed; not from the geranium on the sill, not from the strong cupful of tea she had brewed for her lunch. She sniffed delicately. Ah! Now she knew. It was the smell of apples—dried apples, and it came from the old chest-of-drawers in the spare bedroom off the sitting room. The door was standing ajar.

Leaving her letter she followed that elusive lure. The old chest-of-drawers loomed enormous in the tiny room which she never used because she had had no company of late years. When Lila came to see her, as she did once a year, she stayed at the Jefferson house. So, because the room seemed good for no other purpose, Eliza kept there her best frock, her best hat, and in the chest of drawers she kept her sack of dried apples.

She opened a drawer and took out the sack and peeped into it. How Fergus had loved dried-apple pie with a bit of boiled cider and cinnamon! She had always had her sack of dried apples on that account. She did not care much for them herself, either in pie or sauce. There was quite a sackful. Of course she wouldn't need them now that she was going away. She wondered what she would do with them. Maybe Carrie Rush could use them. She had a big family and anything eatable always came in handy there.

And the chest-of-drawers—the dried-apple chest she called it in her own mind. She would have to sell it. Lila had given her permission to bring a few things, but nothing so cumbersome as this chest. It was not so easy to dispose of that. She sighed as she gazed at it. It was very old. It had been in Fergus' family, had belonged to his mother, she thought, or perhaps his grandmother. It was all handmade, a dark red wood, cherry, presumably. Well, she would leave the chest-of-drawers and take the dried apples over to Carrie Rush so she could get them ready for supper.

With a shawl around her and the sack in her hand she went across the street to the Rush house. Mrs. Rush met her hospitably.

"What's that? Dried apples? Well, I guess they will come in handy. I'll make me a dried apple cake after mother's recipe. Come in and sit down a minute. I want you to meet my company—Mrs. Wallace."

She drew Eliza into the living room where a small, keen-eyed woman sat by the register.

Eliza, glad of a little diversion sat down, and the three women began to talk.

"I feel dreadful about your going away, Mrs. Curry," kindly Mrs. Rush mourned. "I don't know what I shall do without you. You've been the best

neighbor I ever had; I wish there was some way so you could stay."

Eliza smiled her pale, patient smile. "So do I. But I shall be very cozy at my niece's."

"Of course. She will be good to you. No one could fail to be good to you. What are you going to do with your things? Take them with you?"

"I can't. I guess Mr. Pratt, the old furniture man, will take most everything—except, maybe, the dried-apple chest."

"The dried-apple chest!" exclaimed Mrs. Wallace.

Eliza explained. "I'd like to see that chest," Mrs. Wallace said. "Maybe I could sell it for you. I know a woman that's quite a hand for old furniture. She might give you a good price for it."

In the little spare bedroom where the chest loomed so hugely Eliza raised the shade of the one window.

"I suppose maybe it's one hundred fifty years old," she remarked.

"It's a fine old piece," Mrs. Wallace said. "Four drawers and three across the top. And the whole front is solid mahogany. I fancy Mrs. Aldrich would give you fifty dollars for this, anyway."

Eliza drew a long breath. Fifty dollars was a lot of money, and yet for her the old dried-apple chest had a value that could not be expressed in terms of dollars.

Then suddenly Mrs. Wallace went down on her knees and began hunting for something at the bottom of the chest.

"I want a knife or something to pry with," she said.

Eliza brought the knife. Mrs. Wallace inserted the blade in a crack which the varnish almost filled. She worked the knife back and forth, she gave a tug and out flew a drawer that Eliza, perhaps Fergus himself, had never known was there.

"A secret drawer!" cried Mrs. Wallace. "And look here!"

She took out a buckskin pouch which weighed heavily.

Open it! she commanded. But she had to cut the thong with the knife. Out of the pouch poured gold pieces and greenbacks. "Somebody's treasure," she commented.

Eliza stared at the gold in amazement.

"It is Fergus' uncle's money!" she said. "The family always wondered what he did with it. He didn't have a cent when he died. The chest was in his room."

And still she stared, scarcely comprehending the wealth that had so miraculously become hers.

It was not until the next day that she remembered her unfinished letter to Lila. The money was in the bank to her credit. She was again independent of reluctantly charitable relatives.

A moment she contemplated the unfinished page. "Need" was the last word she had written when the fragrance of dried apples started her on her great adventure. Why, she was beyond need now! With a smile she tore the letter to bits, and sat down to write another one.

Hog Reeve

"You ought to be a hog reeve," said one politician to another. Some folks wondered what he meant. A reeve, in old New England, was a bailiff. A hog reeve was bailiff to the pigs. That is, he rounded them up, if they strayed into the streets, and impounded them. Nobody hereabouts holds the position today. Yet if the government should re-establish the post, there would doubtless be applicants for it.

Likewise might it be the post of "woodward." Some may guess that a "woodward" was a warden who had charge of the town woodlots. "Culler of staves" was another post in the ancient days. Not one in a thousand will guess it. This official inspected the staves that were cut for barrels. I suspect that almost everybody knows about the tything man.—Salem News.

In the Fast Wagon

Mrs. Ray Fonnannon, wife of the sheriff of Vigo county, frequently takes her daughter to school in the family sedan. On the way back to town she invites all the small children she passes to ride to their school-houses.

The other day she picked up a little chap about seven years old. When she let him out at his building some of the children told him that he had ridden in the sheriff's car. His eyes grew big; he began to tremble. "Oh, don't tell the teacher they brought me to school in the paddy wagon," he begged. "Or my mother, either."—Indianapolis News.

Wishing Away Time

You hear a lot of fellows saying they wish it was Thursday, or they wish it was their birthday or that it was summer or that this job was done. Now we never could get the idea of wishing away time. You might as well wish away one of your legs. Every time a day goes past there's just so much less of you left.—American Boy Magazine.