Preserving the Declaration of Independence

By WALDON FAWCETT

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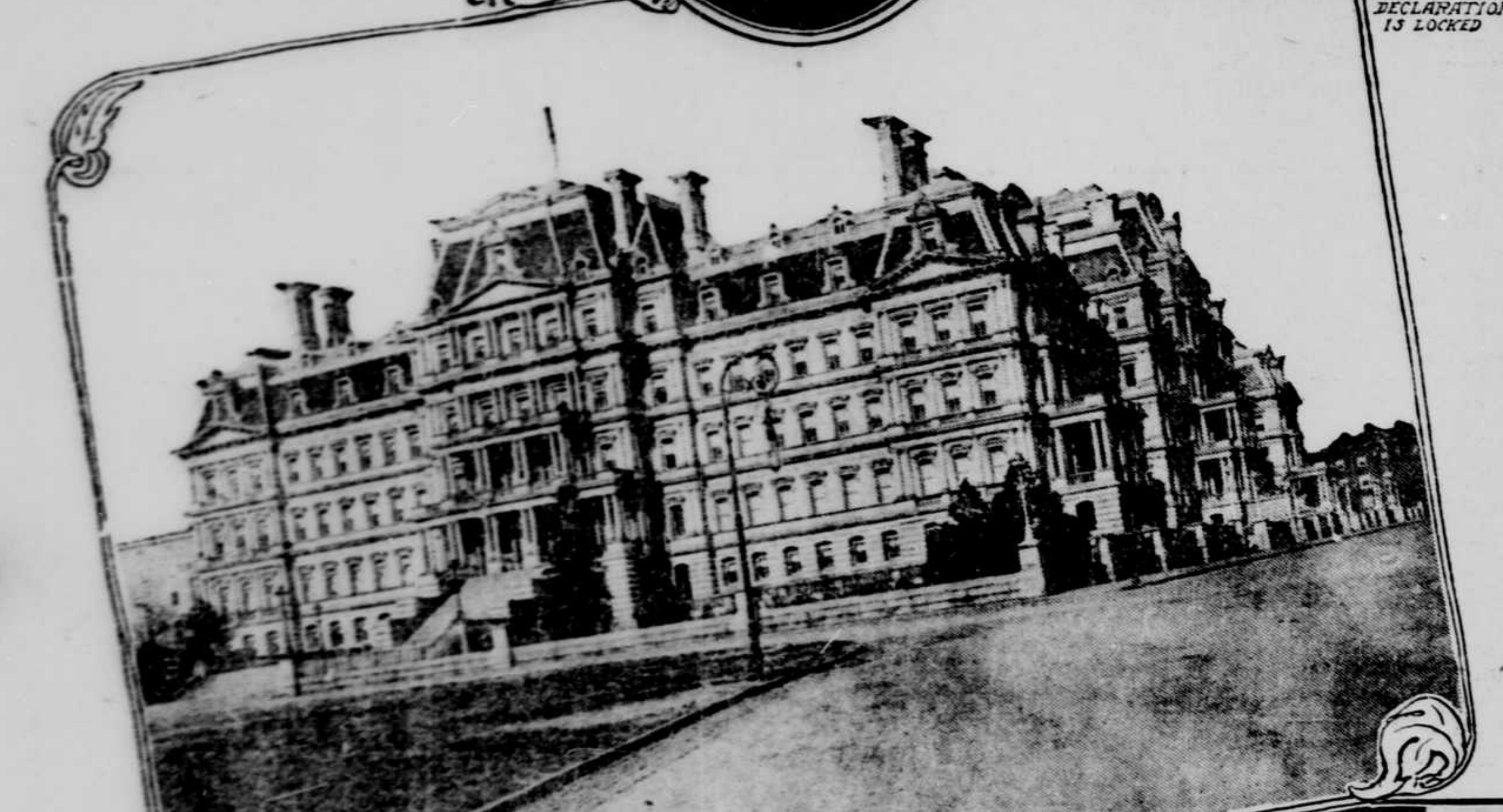
JOHN A. TONNER CUSTODIAN OF THE DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE

SAFE IN WHICH THE DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE IS LOCKED

WHEN, a few weeks ago, the newspaper dispatches from Washington made mention of the fact that a descendant of one of the signers of the Declaration of Independence had applied to the president for permission to look at that famous document the public received its first hint of the extraordinary care exercised by Uncle Sam for the safe keeping of what is, in a way, the nation's most prized possession. Probably no relic in the world is more carefully guarded than this self-same piece of parchment with its roster of significant autograph signatures.

Every time an exposition is held anywhere in the United States the projectors conceive the idea of borrowing the Declaration of Independence as their chief drawing card in the way of an historical exhibit, but all hopes of this kind are doomed to disappointment. The Declaration was transferred to Philadelphia for the Centennial in 1876, but never before nor since has it been out of its depository at the national capital and it is pretty safe to predict that it will never in future be disturbed.



STATE DEPARTMENT BUILDING AT WASHINGTON

During the past decade there has been a redoubling of protective measures looking to the safeguarding and preservation of the invaluable document. Some years ago the secretary of state issued an order that the Declaration should be hermetically sealed in a light-tight, fire-proof, burglar-proof safe, and that this safe should not be opened except upon his written order. How resolute is the determination of the officials to keep the document in that seclusion that is believed to be essential for its preservation may be surmised from the fact that never in the seven years since the "retirement order" was issued has any person been able to induce the secretary of state to issue the necessary order to obtain a peep at the important document.

The Declaration of Independence has had a most interesting history since it came into existence on that memorable fourth of July in Philadelphia one and one-third centuries ago. The penned document that now reposes in the library of the state department at Washington is the one and only official instrument. So far as known, there was no duplicate or extra copy of the declaration made for "printers' copy," as would now be done in the case of any important document the contents of which were to be perpetuated. It is believed that the copy in the hands of Secretary Thomson at the close of the session on that first Independence day went to the official printer, John Dunlap and was used by him as copy. The next day, in making up the journal of the continental congress, the secretary wafered in a blank space left for this purpose a copy of the broadside print.

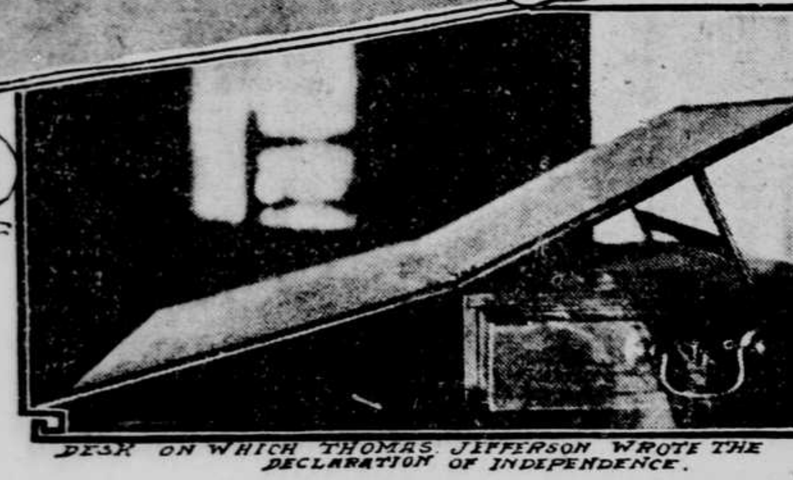
Copies of the printed broadside were also sent out in compliance with the resolution of congress to "assemblies, conventions, councils of safety," etc. Other editions differing somewhat in style were printed by Dunlap to meet the demand for the Declaration and a few copies were printed on vellum. Meanwhile the original document was most carefully preserved. Under an act of congress approved July 27, 1789, the Declaration was deposited in what was then known as the department of foreign affairs. A few months later the name of this branch of the government was changed to department of state and the secretary of state was declared to have charge and custody of the Declaration.

The Declaration has virtually been in the custody of the state department continuously from that date to the present time. To be sure it reposed in the patent office at Washington from 1841 to 1877, but the patent office, it may be recalled, was for many years a part of the department of state and occupied what was believed to be a fireproof building, whereas that which then housed the department of state was not regarded as affording any surety against damage by fire. After the Centennial, however, the Declaration was transferred to the state department proper, that branch of the government having in the meantime acquired an up-to-date building. Here it has remained ever since in the library, which has spacious quarters on the fourth floor of the great granite building occupied by the state, war and navy departments.

The present solicitude for the preservation of the Declaration with all possible care dates from a period somewhat prior to the World's Columbian exposition in Chicago in 1893. It was proposed to transfer the Declaration to Chicago for exhibition and a steel safe or "packing case," as it was then termed, was specially constructed to serve as a repository for the document en route and during the period of the fair. While these preparations were in progress the officials of the state department turned the matter over in their minds and eventually came to the conclusion that it was risky business to have the nation's most honored relic carted about the country, even if the moving was done with all possible care. The president took this view of the matter also and so it was decided not to allow the Declaration to be transferred to Chicago.

About this time John Hay, who was then acting as secretary of state, asked the National Academy of Sciences to carefully investigate the condition of the document and to make suggestions as to ways and means for its preservation. Accordingly President Agassiz of the National Academy appointed a special committee, consisting of John S. Billings, Ira Remsen and Charles F. Chandler, to confer with Secretary Hay on the subject. Eventually this special committee was given an opportunity to make a careful examination of the precious instrument with the assistance of Mr. A. H. Allen, then serving as the chief of the bureau of rolls and library of the state department and also with the aid of Dr. Wilbur M. Gray, of the Army Medical museum.

It was found that the document had suffered very seriously from the very harsh treatment to which it was exposed during the earlier years of the republic. Folding and rolling have creased and broken the parchment. The wet press-copying operation to which it was subjected about 1820 for the purpose of producing a fac-simile copy, removed a large portion of the ink. Subsequent exposure to the action of light for more than 30 years while the instrument was placed on exhibition has resulted in the fading of the ink, particularly in the signatures. The committee was pleased, however, to find that no evidence of mold or other disintegrating agents could be discovered upon the parchment by careful microscopic examination. They also reported against the proposition which had been advanced to apply chemicals with a view to restoring the original color of the ink. It was the opinion of the experts that such application could be but partially successful, inasmuch as a considerable portion of the original ink was removed in making the copy of 1820 and also because such application might result in serious discoloration of the parchment.



DESK ON WHICH THOMAS JEFFERSON WROTE THE DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE.

Finally the committee reported adversely upon the suggestion that any solution, such as collodion, paraffin, etc., be applied with a view to strengthening the parchment or making it moisture proof. But the committee did urge that the document be kept in the dark and as dry as possible, and never placed on exhibition. Accordingly, in 1894, it was hermetically sealed in a frame and placed in the steel case above mentioned, together with the original copy of the constitution of the United States. Then, in 1902, Secretary Hay issued the order in accordance with which the huge square steel box that holds the Declaration was locked and sealed. It has been opened once since that time in order that the officials might ascertain the condition of the document. It appeared to be in exactly the same state of preservation as when placed in the case half a dozen years ago and indeed Mr. John A. Tonner, chief of the division of rolls and library of the state department, the present custodian of the Declaration, is of the opinion that the deterioration or at least the fading of the Declaration has been almost completely arrested.

The interior of the steel safe which comprises the final resting place of the Declaration contains four drawers. In one of these reposes the Declaration—kept perfectly flat between two pieces of heavy plate glass. The other four drawers are given over to the original copy of the constitution, similarly protected. The constitution, it may be added, is in an excellent state of preservation and really does not need the extreme protective measures to which it is subjected because of being in company with the Declaration.

Present-day visitors to the state department, although they may not see the original Declaration of Independence, can inspect something almost as interesting—namely, the original draft of the Declaration in Jefferson's handwriting, with a few interlineations made by Franklin and Adams. This is displayed in a steel cabinet that stands adjacent to the safe containing the original Declaration. The steel exhibition cabinet also holds one of the fac-similes of the engrossed copy of the Declaration—one of those reproductions made by order of President Monroe in order to secure 200 copies for the signers of the Declaration and their heirs.

In a glass case in this same treasure house of historic mementoes is the small, plain, unpolished mahogany desk on which Jefferson wrote the Declaration of Independence. This interesting relic came into possession of the government in 1880. The desk had been given by Thomas Jefferson to Joseph Coolidge, Jr., upon the occasion of the latter's marriage to Jefferson's granddaughter, Miss Randolph. On the death of Mr. Coolidge, whose wife had died a year or two previously, the desk became the property of their four children and was by them presented to the nation. It was the expressed wish of the donors "to offer it to the United States that it may have a place in the department of state with the immortal instrument which was written upon it in 1776."

The desk bears an inscription in Jefferson's handwriting as follows: "Thomas Jefferson gives this writing desk to Joseph Coolidge, Jr., as a memorial of his affection. It was made from a drawing of his own by Ben Randall, cabinet maker, of Philadelphia, with whom he first lodged on his arrival in that city in May, 1776, and is the identical one on which he wrote the Declaration of Independence. Politics as well as religion has its superstitions. These gaining gaining strength with time, may one day give imaginary value to this relic for its association with the birth of the great charter of our independence. Monticello, Nov. 18, 1825."

Although Jefferson was nearly 83 years of age when he presented the desk, his donation inscription, above given, is written in the same bold, clear and strong handwriting in which he penned the Declaration of Independence almost half a century before, when a young man little more than 30.

The circumstances under which Jefferson was selected for the honorable task of writing the Declaration of Independence were at one time the subject of considerable controversy. The evidence on the subject is derived chiefly from the writings of John Adams and of Jefferson himself. These two distinguished statesmen disagree as to some important details.

Mr. Jefferson in his memoir written in 1821 states simply that the committee for drawing the Declaration desired him to do it: that he accordingly wrote it, and that, being approved by the committee, he reported it to congress on Friday, the twenty-eighth of June, when, after three days of debate, it was adopted on July 4.

In Mr. Adams' autobiography he says: "The committee of independence were Thomas Jefferson, John Adams, Benjamin Franklin, Roger Sherman, Robert R. Livingston. There were more reasons than one for the selection of Jefferson for such important work. He had the reputation of a masterly pen; he was a delegate from Virginia. Another reason was Richard Henry Lee was not beloved by most of his colleagues from Virginia, and Jefferson was set up to rival and supplant him. The committee had several meetings in which were proposed the articles of which the Declaration was to consist, and minutes made of them. The work of making the draft was left to Jefferson and me, but on my insistence Jefferson alone did the work.

Summed up, the substantial points of difference in the accounts of these two men regarding the same transaction relates to the action of the committee in designating the person or persons who were to prepare the draft of a Declaration. Mr. Adams states that Jefferson and himself were appointed a subcommittee to prepare it; Mr. Jefferson states that he alone was directed by the committee to write the Declaration. This question is not important, since Mr. Adams' version does not in the least impair Mr. Jefferson's claim to the authorship of the instrument.

It is proper to add that Mr. Jefferson's account is confirmed by the original manuscript draft of the Declaration, exhibiting the corrections and interlineations made by Dr. Franklin and Mr. Adams in their respective handwritings. These amendments were not important. The reasons assigned by Mr. Adams for the selection of Mr. Jefferson as the writer of the Declaration are so numerous that it is difficult to determine which of them he intended should be regarded as the principal or decisive one. In the autobiography he states that there were more reasons than one why Mr. Jefferson was appointed on a committee of such importance. He assigns two reasons: one, Mr. Jefferson's reputation as a writer, and the other the desire of his Virginia colleagues to have Mr. Jefferson supplant Mr. Richard Henry Lee. In a letter to Mr. Pickering Mr. Adams gives as the reason why Mr. Jefferson was placed at the head of the committee that it was "the Frankfort advice to place Virginia at the head of everything;" but he also adds that Mr. Jefferson brought with him to congress "a reputation for literature, science and a happy talent of composition," and that this reputation had been sustained by writings "remarkable for their peculiar felicity of expression." As in the case of Washington, therefore, it would seem that there were reasons of eminent fitness and qualification for the duty assigned; and certainly the Declaration of Independence itself fully justifies the selection. Few state papers have ever been written with more skill, or greater adaptation to the purposes in view. Whether its sentiments were purely original with its author, or were gathered from the political philosophy which had become familiar to the American mind, through the great discussions of the time, it must forever remain an imperishable monument of his power of expression and his ability to touch the passions, as well as to address the reason of mankind.

With regard to the passage concerning slavery, which was stricken out of Jefferson's draft, we may well conceive that both northern and southern men might have felt the injustice of the terrible denunciation with which he charged upon the king all the horrors, crimes and consequences of the African slave trade, and in which he accused him of exciting the slaves to insurrection, and "to purchase the liberty of which he had deprived them by murdering the people upon whom he had obtruded them." Mr. Jefferson, in drawing up the list of our national accusations against the king, obviously intended to refer to him as the representative of the public policy and acts of the mother country; and it is true that the imperial government was, and must always remain, responsible for the existence of slavery in the colonies. But this was not one of the grievances to be redressed by the Revolution, it did not constitute one of the reasons for aiming at independence, and there was not sufficient ground for the accusation that the government of Great Britain had knowingly sought to excite general insurrections among the slaves.

Talbot's Recovery

By RICHARD BARKER SHELTON

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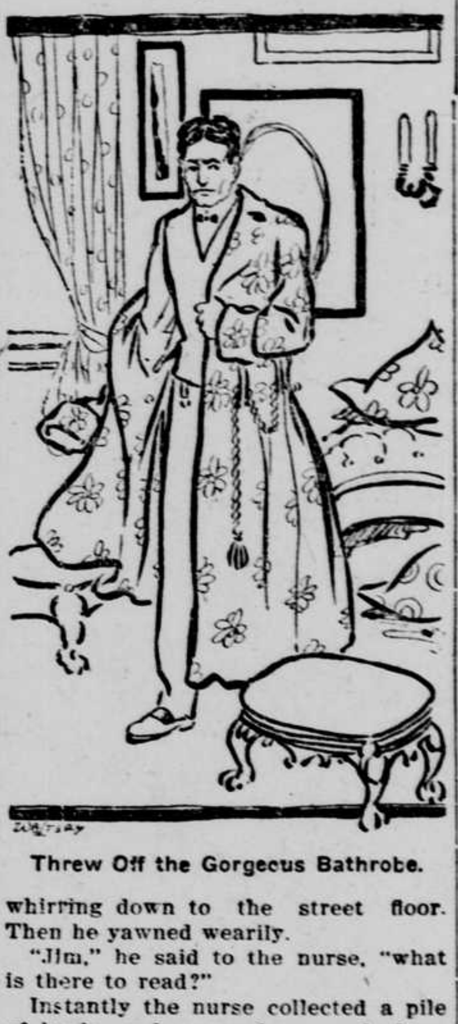
The trees in the little park just across the avenue were coming to leaf. Tireless robins flitted to and fro among the branches, piping blithely in the first mellow warmth of the coming spring. Up and down the asphalt rolled trim carriages, whizzing motors, and smart high-seated traps, and in the carriages and the motors and the traps care-free people laughed and chatted and drank in the glory of the perfect day.

And because of all this, Talbot, stretched on the couch by the window of his apartments, was heavy of heart. He had the grace to be aware that he should be thankful just to recline there and watch the sunshine and the robins and the whirl of traffic on the pavements below. He had been very ill, and even now the doctor was cautioning the nurse to keep Talbot very quiet and to be sure he didn't over-exert himself now that he was convalescing.

But the splendor of the day without bred in the pale young man a decided sense of unrest. He turned away his head and made a wry face as he listened to the doctor's instructions and the nurse's assurances that he would follow them out to the letter. Then Talbot glanced at the calendar on the desk in the corner, saw that the date, the seventh of April, had a circle about it, and his lips set stubbornly. He had been striving might and main to get on his feet by that date, and here was the doctor telling the nurse that the patient must be kept very quiet for another two weeks at least.

The young man's mouth widened in a certain grim smile; but out of the corner of his eye he watched the doctor take his departure, and listened anxiously until the elevator gate down the corridor clanged and the car went whirring down to the street floor. Then he yawned wearily.



Threw Off the Gorgeous Bathrobe.

"Jim," he said to the nurse, "what is there to read?"

Instantly the nurse collected a pile of books and magazines and bore them to the couch. Talbot sniffed.

"Those!" he said in fine disgust. "Read 'em all long ago. They're no good anyway."

He pulled a handful of silver from his pockets. "Go out and get me some fresh ones," he instructed. "All you can pick up. And say, don't come back without a copy of that English review, the what's-its-name; you know the one I mean," he added with a chuckle, well knowing the nurse would have to travel to a certain little shop a half mile or more distant to procure it. "Be sure to get that."

"Yes, sir. You shall have it if there's one in town," the nurse declared, changing his white coat for one of tweed and picking up his hat.

No sooner had the nurse departed than Talbot was off the couch. He was still rather weak. His legs were wabbly beneath him, and his head was altogether too much inclined to lightness; but he set his teeth, glanced at that date on the calendar, threw off the gorgeous bathrobe which swathed his tall frame, and began to dress with a nervous haste. Whatever else happened, he must be out of the apartment before the nurse returned.

Dressing proved rather more of a task than he had anticipated, but for all that, he stuck to it doggedly, and when he stood finally before the long mirror, surveying himself in the street clothes which had been hanging on their forms in the closet for the past two months, he was aware of a decided glow of triumph. He caught a carnation from the well-filled vase on the center table and stuck it jauntily into his buttonhole. Then, walking rather unsteadily and with eyes preternaturally bright, he slipped into the hall, went down the corridor and rang for the elevator.

The elevator boy stared at him in unbelief, whereupon Talbot chuckled delightedly, dropped an eyelid, and thrust a hand into his pocket. A moment later a bit of gold found its way into the palm of the elevator boy.

"You haven't seen me, of course, Mike," he suggested. "Do you get the idea?"

"Sure. I get it," Mike chuckled as the car stopped at the street floor and Talbot wabbled out of it toward the sunlit street.

At the curb he summoned a hansom, climbed in and gave an address to the cabby. Then the equipage rattled off, and Talbot settled himself on the cushions with a long sigh of relief. His little ruse had worked; he had made his escape from Jim's watchful eyes.

At the first corner they turned, he saw on the sidewalk Jim himself, hurrying along with a huge bundle of magazines. Talbot leaned far back in the hansom and chuckled again.

Uptown they whisked through the mellow sunlight of the spring afternoon and stopped finally before a certain house. Talbot alighted, paid the cabby, gave him instructions to wait, and then mounted the steps and rang the bell.

A few moments later Talbot, seated in a big, dim library, heard the swish of skirts and a little stifled cry. He got unsteadily to his feet, just as a girl came into the room.

"Ted!" she was saying, alarm, reproof, wonder, all in her tones at once. "What does this mean? What are you doing here?"

"Barbara," he replied, "what day is this?"

"What day is it? Why, it is the seventh of April, but—"

"I told you three years ago to-day," said Talbot quietly, "that on the seventh of every April I should come to you to renew my pleading. Just once every year I said I should come, and on the seventh of April. I always keep my word."

"But Ted, you crazy boy, you have been ill. They told me you wouldn't leave the house for another month yet."

"Did they, indeed?" said he calmly. "Well, very probably I shouldn't have done so, but you see, this very important date happened to arrive on schedule time, and so—"

"Where was Jim? How did you manage to bribe him?"

"I didn't bribe him," Talbot laughed. "There are no sins of corruption on my head. I sent him out to get some magazines, and when he went I—well, sneaked seems to be the word best fitting my exit."

"I shall telephone Dr. Harper at once," she declared severely. "I shall tell him that you have disobeyed orders; that you are here and—"

"Are you going to tell him why?" Talbot suggested.

The girl's face reddened. "No, of course not," she said.

"Well, you might also inform him that so long as I am here I intend to stay here until—well, until a certain matter that has been pending altogether too long, is settled up either one way or other," said he. "Barbara, I am going to ask that question once more, and I want a final answer."

"And you don't care what sort of an answer it is, so long as it is final?" she mocked.

"Don't I?" cried Talbot getting to his feet, with a suddenness that left him faint and giddy.

The girl saw him swaying. She ran to his side.

"Ted, Ted, you foolish, foolish boy," she said, "you are still very ill and weak, and to think of your coming here to-day."

"You haven't given me the answer," he said, trying to keep his voice steady.

She pushed him gently back to his chair.

"The answer?" she said softly. "Why, why if you must have it, if you must—"

She turned away her eyes.

"Oh, Ted, I didn't know until you were ill and in danger, and—"

He caught her hand and drew her to him.

Talbot was asleep on the couch. The doctor, whom the nurse had hurriedly summoned, was frowning in puzzled fashion.

"Crazy idiot," he snapped, "going out like that. By good rights it should be the death of him. But somehow he seems rather better for it."

"Yes, he certainly does seem better," said the mystified nurse.

A Nice Calculation

Two very dear old ladies walked up to the window where tickets were to be sold for two popular concerts. They wanted tickets for both nights, but alas! those for the second evening were all gone. This was the more popular entertainment of the two.

"I'm so sorry, my dear!" pattered one of the old ladies to the other. "We did want to go, didn't we, and we wanted to go both nights."

"You couldn't give us two tickets for each night?" inquired the other, of the clerk.

"No, ma'am."

"You haven't two seats anywhere for the second night?"

"No, ma'am. Couldn't give you nose room."

A great resolution beamed upon her gentle face.

"Then," said she firmly, "give me four tickets for the first night. We will make them do."

"Why, sister," quavered the other, "you going to invite somebody?"

"No," said she, "but if we can't go both nights—" She paused, bewildered, quite out of her calculation. Then a happy thought struck her, and she added, "We'll go twice the first night."—Youth's Companion.

Still Ahead.

"Hard to beat Yonkers," remarked Charles Philip Easton, president of the Yonkers board of education.

"What has happened now?" inquired Charles E. Gorton, president of the People's Savings bank.

"Well, our Marathon runners are up in front, we make the best hats, carpets and elevators, and now our Mayor Lennon has beaten a best record established by Mayor Gaynor of New York."

"What's that?"

"Lennon has eight children but Gaynor has only seven."

Husbands and wives who have only each other to blame for their unhappiness usually do it.

The Absent-Minded Traveler.

Otto Carmichael travels a great deal on the sleeping cars, from one end of the country to the other. Carmichael is absent minded at time. A few days ago his secretary came to him and handed him a sheet of typewritten copy, saying:

"I'd like to get 100 of those printed."

"What is it?" asked Carmichael.

"It's a form letter to send to the Pullman people when you leave your pajamas on the sleeping cars."—Philadelphia Saturday Evening Post.

Relative Values

An Indianapolis business man was marooned on election night in 1904 in an Illinois village. He could not get out that night. Naturally he was interested in the election. He wanted to find out whether Mr. Roosevelt or Mr. Parker had won. He began investigating and discovered that the telephone girl quit at six o'clock, and that the telegraph agent at the station knocked off work after the morning train went through, which was rarely later than six p. m.

At eight o'clock the landlord shut up the hotel, telling his guest to take the room at the head of the stairs when he was ready to go to bed. No news was to be had and the business man went to bed, that being all he could do.

Next morning he was awakened by the heavy tread of boots on the plank sidewalk. He threw up the window and asked the passer-by: "Say, who was elected?"

"I was, by heck!" replied the man proudly. "Third term for constable."—Philadelphia Saturday Evening Post.

Woman Expert Librarian.

The trustees of Princeton searched for a year before they requested Jane Wright of Cincinnati to take charge of the art library in the university. Miss Wright was librarian of the Cincinnati Art museum and has resigned to go to Princeton. The first wish of the trustees was to have a man in the position, but although more than 40 men of experience in the work were weighed carefully none was found so deserving as Miss Wright. Her qualifications left the trustees no alternative, and then it was only by much persuasion that she was prevailed on to make the change. She had become attached to the Cincinnati library, which was largely of her making, and it was only the chance for a wider field of usefulness in Princeton that finely led her east.