

## TENTH LETTER.

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HAWKINS HAND—WINCHESTER REES—ASABEL BELL—ISAAC N. REYNOLDS—W. B. TOLLE—THE POLEMIC DEBATING SOCIETY—THE LYCEUM AND ATHENEUM—JOHN A. M'CLUNG—LOW WATER ORATORY—THE "MERRIMAC" BALL—F. T. COCKRELL—LORENZO CONWELL—COBURN DEWEES—A MAYSVILLE SOLDIER.

LOUISVILLE, KY., June 11, 1883.

*Dr. John P. Phister—My Young Friend:* Hawkins Hand was one of the men I knew in Maysville before the market house was built. I am not quite certain what business he was engaged in. I think maybe he kept a wagon yard. Wagon yards were prominent industries of the city prior to 1830, and I frequently get confused on account of them. Hand was a man of poetical turn of mind and was somewhat fond of the beautiful in nature as evidenced by the fact that he was a neighbor of my old friend Casto, and enjoyed that panoramic view of which I wrote you in a previous letter. Hand was not of the same physical build and model of Winchester Rees, quite the contrary I think.

Rees was one of the most genteel men in dress and address that I remember as living in Maysville. He was deservedly popular.

When general Bragg was in Kentucky in 1862 I heard that he was keeping tavern at Winchester, and I hoped to see him but business was too pressing.

Asabel Bell was a prominent man and had the good will of the people. He was known as S. L. Bell. He was a free man of color and a good barber. The few free men of color who lived in Maysville in early days stood well with the people and I may say that the slaves were well treated.

I never blamed the driver of our gun carriage for stepping out that first night. The wonder is that the artilleryists, powder monkeys and camp followers did not all go in pursuit of the sound. It was glorious. I don't care what other historians may say about it. The nerve we displayed in standing by it is worthy of emulation by the young men of new Maysville.

Speaking of historians brings to my mind the important fact that I am not one of that class of public benefactors, and at the same time I take occasion to make a statement which has been too long delayed. It was an accident by which your proposition in the council to demolish the old market house was brought to my attention. I had not seen the building for more than forty years. The people who used to frequent it when I knew it must have been, in the regular order of nature, in their graves. I knew that it was for the good of the coming generation in and about

Maysville that the old building should go. I knew that Babylon, Ninevah and Assyria had gone before it. I knew that empires had passed away by reason of the ambition of man. Knowing these things I felt that the old building had served its purpose and that it was doomed to fall before a destroying council. None of the old boys of Maysville would have plotted for the destruction of that house. In the march of events it had to go, and ought to have gone earlier, and young men had to give the order. I could not let the old house with so many pleasant memories be swept away without a protest. I addressed that protest, in behalf of myself and some old departed friends therein named, to you. I am glad it was treated with respect by being kept a secret. Feeling that I could confide in you I have turned over memory's pages and have given you from time to time extracts having reference to many people, places and things in and around Maysville in the days when I was young. You may not have read them. Maybe you could not read them. I was never a good penman and when I went into the practice of the law I soon got to writing two hands. One I could not read myself and one nobody else could read. I want to say to you now, whether you read them or not, that in all I have written I have done the very best I knew how. There was never any occasion for me to give offense and I have written with the most sincere kindness of all. I have written of many who went away to their final rest long ago. I would not disturb them if I could and I am sure I would not bring a sorrow to those who mourn their loss. It is a misfortune to me that I write and speak seriously on all important subjects, and, therefore, I am frequently misunderstood. I was driven out of politics because I could not tell jokes on the stump. When I was in the ministry so sensitive was I of the feelings of my congregation that I could not preach hell and damnation up to the full standard of the period. I attribute this misfortune to the fact that I devoted the days of my youth to Sunday schools and mathematics. Now, my young friend, I pray you when you do read my correspondence, and I hope you will, because if you don't, no one else will, that you realize that if there is one word in it that by a remote possibility could give offense I would drop a tear of regret and blot it out forever. I except from this blotting business Montague's soap and candle factory, because it frequently gave offense to me, though none was probably intended.

Isaac Newton Reynolds, Washington B. Tolle, and other young men formed a debating society called the Polemic Debating Society. This society held its meetings in the council chamber and sometimes, I think, in the seminary building. I have no question but what this society was a benefit to the young men who composed its membership. I remember that one of the by-laws was that each member should furnish a candle to light up with. I guess the candles came from Montague's or somewhere else. I was invited to attend a meeting of this society and act as referee, when the question, "Which has produced the greatest men, England or America" was debated. I declare to you that I never heard such an overhauling of private character and such denunciation of public acts as that

debate brought out. They went at it at early candle light. I went to sleep and when the candles had burned low in the sockets I was waked up to decide the question on the merits of the debate. It was a delicate position to be placed in. I knew I had been asleep and I thought the debaters knew it. I assumed the responsibility and decided that England had produced the greater men because she had a longer time in which to produce them. I made no enemies by the decision and was congratulated on my astuteness. This society was composed of worthy young men who were clerks in the stores or apprentices to some mechanical business. It may be that some of the members are yet living in Maysville and will remember some of the questions submitted for debate by my friend Dick Dobyns, who also patronized the more pretentious literary societies, the Lyceum and Atheneum.

Speaking of history reminds me of another proposition. There are many reasons given for changing one's name. I will cite a few. Crime, enlistment or volunteering into an army, inheritance of wealth by which one is required to take the name of another, divorce by which the court might decree that the husband should take the maiden name of his wife. In the court where I practiced, it was exceedingly difficult to tell what decree would be entered. You do not recognize the name of your correspondent because you were not a man of public affairs when he was a factor in the serious matters of every day life when the old market house was new. The old boys who have stood at their post in Maysville have taken up with the new comers and forgotten some, who, from necessity or other causes dropped out. That is all, nothing more.

In 1840 I went with my friend, John A. McClung, to the great whig convention at Chillicothe, Ohio. There was a man whose companionship any gentleman might envy. He was a theologian, politician, lawyer and historian. A man of simple, unpretending manners and great kindness of heart. I remember this incident of that trip. We went to Portsmouth, Ohio, on a steamboat called the *Transit*. A very large number of other whigs were on board, also going to the convention. After supper when the boat was in the neighborhood of Brush creek, Mr. McClung was invited to make a speech. He stood on a chair in the back part of the cabin whilst the other part of the cabin was crowded with listeners. The water in the river was very low and navigation was hazardous. The boat struck the bar suddenly and Mr. McClung was pitched headlong among the listeners, much to their amusement and the discomfiture of McClung. We were the guests of William Key Bond while we were in Chillicothe.

In the winter of 1836, I think it was, the steamboat *Merrimac* was left high and dry on the lower grade by the receding waters of the river. In the spring when the boat floated off there was a ball given on board. The up town folks were cast down in spirits because they had no grade to catch boats on. When they did get a grade a coal boat was sunk at the lower end of it, but there was no fun in that.

There were two young men in Maysville of whom I want to say a kind word. They were contemporaries with the days of stage travel and were

favorably known to those who frequented the taverns of the city. I refer to Francis T. Cockrell and Lorenzo Conwell. They were the clerks at the leading taverns and the first to salute the traveler on his arrival and the last to bid him God speed on his journey on his departure. Oftentimes when the stage would drive up to the tavern door have I heard the cheery voice of Cockrell saying, "Alight out, gentlemen, alight out, gentlemen, hot supper on the table." Tavern clerks did not confront you in those days with jewelry and insolence, and the waiters were content to let you finish your meals before receiving their gratuity.

I think there was another tavern clerk named Holroyd. I think he was clerk for Dudley at Langhorne's old stand. I shan't be certain of that however. He was not there a great while but I am sure he behaved himself for the time being.

I used to know a few years before I left Maysville a man named Coburn Dewees. I think he came from Washington. As I remember him he was a genial man with a quaint flow of humor, as an evidence of which I think he was one of the honorary members of the gun squad, and I think he may have been on active duty on more than one occasion.

Somehow or other Maysville is always at the fore front when big things are being done, whether it be at a feast, frolic or a fight. When general Pemberton was taking care of Vicksburg in the early days of its period, the federal general, Sherman, came down and tried a flank movement by way of Chickasaw bayou. That attempt was in its conception the very essence of destruction to his command. Yet he made it and made a desperate assault, which was repulsed, of course. In the retreat of Sherman's troops, among the dead and wounded left in the field was that of a captain of infantry who had been shot in the head. By his dead body was a youthful private soldier who had clung to his captain and tried to get his body off the field until he himself was struck with a piece of shell and rendered helpless. The captain was from Frankfort, Ky., and the private soldier had lived in Maysville, but knew but little about the place. The captain's body was buried with tenderness at the foot of a large tree and the grave was plainly marked that his friends might have no difficulty in finding his remains. The wounded private was made a prisoner and I am sure he had no cause to regret his gallantry or that he mentioned the name of Maysville. The withdrawal of the federal troops from that bayou in one night was among the best military movements of the war. The commander is entitled to more credit for that than he was for the march to the sea.

I am pained to say that my visit to Maysville must be delayed for awhile. I am an invalid and in search of health. I am directed by my physician to seek the bracing atmosphere of the Rocky Mountains or the New England hills. I have been a wanderer for many years at home and in foreign lands, and have been wonderfully preserved against the encroachment of a chronic ailment. I have looked forward to my return to Maysville with great pleasure, especially since I have formed your acquaintance. Of course I expected some attention from the council and other philanthropic bodies. I can wait and so can the council *et al.* My

daughter, Annie Gordon, who knows nothing of your city save what she has learned from me, was delighted at the prospect of meeting with those who knew her father in his school boy days. I have spoken to her of the girls of old Maysville until she can call their names as readily as I can. You will not forget the staff. I will send for it and when I do come to Maysville you shall hear my lecture.

CONFIDENTIAL—The old market house served its purpose when standing. Its proposed demolition brought forth my recollections of the old town. My recollections sharpened the memories of others by which I hope the history of the place will be made perfect. My reminiscences are absolutely valueless except to stir up others who know more and who can deal their knowledge out in more palatable doses.

I am not known among my acquaintances as ever having lived in Maysville and I might walk every street in the place and not one person would speak to me as if he knew that I had once been a citizen of the city. Forty years is a long time to be absent from the friends of your youth, and memory grows very dim as to those who play the humble roles in the battle of life. I would like to read the story of Maysville since 1840.