

[Alan Wallace]

Name: Louise G. Bassett

Title: Living Lore

Assignment: Brookfield

Topic: Alan Wallace No. 3 [12/8/37?]

Alan Wallace's hospitable three rooms "over the river" are always fun to visit. Alan never fails to make you feel welcome and at home. One early winter evening we went to "call" and stayed to visit. Reluctant to leave the comfortable, shabby living room where there was contentment and friendship, we let time fly by. We had been chuckling over the antics of a well-known Brookfield character whose chief delight was attending funerals. Suddenly, Alan began to laugh, his keen eyes twinkling. [???

"You know, Mrs. B- isn't really so eccentric. There's quite a few people get a kick out of funerals."

We settled ourselves. Alan was off on a story.

"A lot of people go to every funeral they hear of, friend or stranger alike. Why do they? Because it's usually good entertainment. They think it makes them look important to be seen everywhere and besides it gives them a chance to visit old friends.

"My Mother told me of the funeral of a friend of hers that she attended years ago. It seems as if it might have taken place today. I'll tell you about it but I'll change the names of all parties concerned, for this is really true - it actually happened, in a town very near here.

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"Mother's friend, Mrs. Julia Jones had gone to her last rest and the town - I'll call it Derbyville - turned out in full force to see the start of her trip.

"She was a fine woman, respected by everybody in town and greatly beloved by the few who knew her well. But as much as Julia Jones was liked, I'm afraid the big turn-out was not entirely for her.

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She had a husband, Herbert Jones, who was known as one of the outstanding citizens of the town - who - speaking honestly - liked to 'show off,' and everybody felt this would be his chance to pull something worth while and no one wanted to be left out of the 'know.'

"So, the tree-shaded street on which the Jones house was located was filled with all kinds of - what shall I call them - equipages - (some word.) And the town cop, Lige Morrow, was in his element. He didn't have a chance, very often, to direct traffic, such as he had that day.

"The town was proud of Lige. There wasn't many towns that had a cop who was a combination of good natured efficiency and inoffensive efficousness. He greeted every newcomer with a genial smile, 'drive right in here, Joe, nice day for the funeral, some turnout, huh?' He turns to another carriage - with a team this time, 'Oh, good afternoon, [Mr.?] Fowler, there's plenty of room right here; very sad about Mrs. Jones isn't it, Sir, great loss to the town.'

"Lige helped Mrs. Fowler out of the carriage while Mr. Fowler tied his horses to the hitching rail, 'How are you these days, Mrs. Fowler, you know I was afraid one while there I would be on duty for one of these things up at your house before the fall was over but I guess I'm out of luck. [you?] You look immense.'

"I dare say you've all gathered that the Fowlers were one of the 'best' families.

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“Inside the Jones house three ministers stood waiting, all ready for their part in the services and Miss Effie Holcum, from a neighboring town, was seated in a chair under the stairs in the front hall, nervously fingering a hymn book. Twenty 3 years or more ago some one told Effie she had a beautiful soprano voice and she had believed it ever since. Effie was counted on to crash through with something worth listening to and it was a ten to one shot she would.

“But the star of the whole thing was to be Herbert Jones - Herb always took a prominent part in all the town doings and no one expected him to miss this opportunity, and from all accounts he disappointed no one. They had placed Julia in the front / parlor, where the dear soul lay surrounded by numerous mourning relatives. The back parlor and the dining room was crowded by the more prosperous and influential townspeople. This was the first time some of them had ever been in the house and they didn't miss a detail of the furnishings. The two front rooms upstairs had been set aside for the less important of the town but the crowd was much larger than Herbert had hoped for and some of the 'socialites' were being hustled up the stairs by the undertaker Herbert had imported from the city. He had brought him on ostensibly as a mark of respect to Julia but really it was to give the townsfolk a sample of what he could do.

“Naturally this undertaker didn't know the citizens of the town and to solve this problem Herbert had given him a carefully prepared list of names and locations but undertakers, even classy ones from the city are only human and many unexpected arrivals were not on the list. This gave Herbert the opportunity 4 he has been waiting for[.?] Sensing the situation, he rose from his seat in the front parlor, worked his way to the hall way and took command. Before the city undertaker could realize what it was all about[.?] Herbert was standing on the third step of the stairway, leaning over the banister and from this point he regulated and directed the traffic.

“He had the center of the stage and he held it. His smile was tinged with sadness and his handclasp a shade more prolonged than usual expressed feelings too deep for utterance.

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The greetings over, Herbert broke his pose of sorrow and became the hustling executive. Erect, he stood upon the stairway, his right arm upraised, two fingers extended upright, his voice vibrant as he called to someone who was seating those who were to be upstairs. 'two in the east bedroom, Charlie, nice comfortable seats, all right? Fine, yes, two, all right,' he would turn to the couple who were waiting, 'Right upstairs, Mrs. Wells, and you too, George, you'll find us a little crowded I'm afraid but Charlie Bemis will take care of you. Nice of you to come, I appreciate it, right up this way, please, that's That's it.'

At this point of the story we all rebelled - with peals of laughter - came protests, "It couldn't be," "Impossible." "You're not telling the truth," etc. etc.

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"I don't blame you for doubting me but I give you my word I am telling the absolute truth," said Allen, "this is exactly what happened and you ain't heard nothin' yet. Well, how about it, want me to go on?"

Did we? We certainly did.

"Very well then, I will if you behave yourselves. The scene on the stairs was repeated until everyone seemed to have arrived and then and not until then, Herbert went back to his seat in the parlor and became the bereaved husband again.

"After a few seconds of quiet the services began. The late pastor of one of the churches - Andrew Adams - offered a prayer. Andrew had been brought in for the occasion. Nearly everybody in town knew the old gentleman for there had been much hard feeling when he left the town. Part of the congregation insisted on getting rid of him. They thought him old-fashioned and an old fogey. Others had been as rabid in support and there had been a great deal of bitterness shown on both sides. His side, unfortunately for the Reverend had lost out, but, the larger part of the church held the old gentleman in affectionate regard.

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“His prayer was a masterpiece. Andrew adopted the time-tried system of telling the Almighty many facts and opinions, seemingly in strict confidence between the Lord and himself, but actually intended for the ears that were listening.

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“He gave a lengthy lengthy account of his departure from Derbyville in favor of the present younger and some thought, more able worker in the vineyard, with several caustic but dignified remarks about the ‘youngster’ who had taken his place. He was careful to tell the All-Wise how he ought to deal with similar cases in the future.

“That the prayer created a wild sensation is putting it mildly. Andrew had waited a long time for this chance and he made the most of every point. Having placed his case before the Almighty he then prayed feelingly for the dear departed sister. Without saying so in so many words, he implied that her arrival at the Pearly Gates would be an event, and that Paradise would then become a much better place in which to live.

“The next speaker was the Reverend Joseph John Jenkins, the present pastor. The young man referred, with extreme sweetness, to the ‘aged servant of the Lord,’ who had justspoken. He very gently suggested that the Reverend Adams was in his second childhood and advised the Lord not to take what he had said, seriously.

“Naturally, Andrew was fit to be tied but what could he do? The Reverend Jenkins had the last word and was sitting pretty. In closing, Joseph John recited an affecting poem by the local poetess, Marion Martin, entitled ‘resignation,’ which was a big hit and Marion was warmly congratulated on all sides, after the funeral.

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“Another few seconds of silence, then a new voice broke the stillness. There was a great craning of necks and much quiet whispering, ‘Who is he?’

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"It finally became known that the voice belonged to a cousin of Herbert's who was a noted divine from afar, who had also been imported for the occasion. He paid a really beautiful tribute to the sweet, lovable, Julia, so beautiful, that tears came to the eyes of his listeners and a sob to their throats. For his finale, he recited 'Crossing the Bar' and never before had the old favorite seemed so full of beauty.

"Another second of silence and Effie Holcum, who had been on pins and needles for quite a 'spell,' rose and hurried to the place in the sun lately used by the three men of God. She coughed, opened her hymn book and was 'off.' Effie had no accompanist and needed none. Voices like hers were better taken straight for with a piano as a running mate her renditions took more or less the form of a dog fight. She had a deep-seated objection to keeping on the key, and her own idea of time made it better for Effie to 'go it alone.'

"But it was not her voice and method alone that commanded attention. It was, also, the amazing length of the hymns she selected; after each verse she would pause long enough to create the hope that she was 'all done' and everybody would settle back with a sigh of relief when Effie would quaver uncertainly into another verse, sustaining the suspense until her hearers were literally limp from alternate hope and despair.

"When she finally was through and fluttered back to her chair, most of her audience couldn't see into the hall, so they didn't dare hope that she had really quit until the Reverend Joseph John Jenkins pronounced a benediction and the services were over.

"Mother said as they passed to have a last look at Julia, she looked so kindly with a half smile on her lips that all remembrance of what had gone before faded away and everyone passed out of the door genuinely regretting that they would never see her cheery smile again. But, Herbert, who had headed the procession, was standing on the front steps and as Mother reached him he said, in a low tone, 'doin' pretty good don't you think. There's goin' to be one hundred and two carriages in the parade to the cemetery. Don't think the town ever saw anything like it before.' As Mother passed down the steps,

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she could hear the grief-stricken husband still murmuring to friends and mourners, 'One hundred and two carriages.'"