

Wallace W. Henderson
Read Feb 1, 1973

"DAILY JOTS"

This is the age of the columnist. An era in which syndicated professional writers in a large measure control the thinking and reading of the American public. It was not always so; time was when the standing of a newspaper was determined by the reputation and force of its editorial writers, but that day has largely passed, as very few now have a strong editorial policy, but content themselves with publishing the news, leaving the field of creative thinking in other hands. Columnists cover practically the entire field of human thinking; ranging from religion, through politics, health, sex, advice to the lovelorn, gossop of the stage and screen, to ridiculous. Some are vicious, endeavoring to pry into the private lives of persons in the public eye, or into the top secrets of the most high; always hoping for a sensational scoop with which to startle the reading public, and caring not whose reputation is besmirched. Others are more benign, having as their objective the improvement of the lives and thinking of their readers, or, in a lighter vein to entertain and amuse.

The subject of this paper was of the latter type, for, during the period 1915 to 1926, the readers of the Kentucky New Era enjoyed such a column, written daily by Mr. Thomas Cuthbert Underwood and carried under the mast-head of "Daily Jots". The column, in a large measure, reflected the personality of its author and sparkled with wisdom, wit, poetry, and pathos from an ever facile pen. In addition to his original writings, he included contributions mailed to him by patrons and admirers, together with selected clippings from other papers. Its purpose is best portrayed by the author's own introduction.

"It's a sad old world, and a mad old world,
Sometimes, Alas, it's a bad old world,
Our dearest hope as we jog along,
Is never to mope, that our foolish song
And joyous zest of jingle or jest,
May help to make it a glad old world."

Tom Underwood spent his entire life in Hopkinsville. He was born here, attended the local schools, and at an early age became associated with the Daily Kentucky New Era as a reporter. He soon became editor, which position he held during the remainder of his life. He loved Hopkinsville, and although as his reputation as a writer spread, he was offered numerous more lucrative positions, he steadfastly refused to leave. Frequent references were made in the column to his love for his home town.

"It may be some folks go away because there is no place like home, but the train always moves too slowly when we are coming back to Hopkinsville. It's the best and prettiest town on earth. Sure, we had a wonderful time at French Lick, met a lot of charming people, played golf on the sporty hill course and also on the lower links - one morning in the rain, ahhh! - and everything was lovely; but we are mighty glad to get back to what Col. Bob McBryde calls "Hopheaven". Any sort of traveling is a torture to us. We're a homebody."

In a more poetic mood he takes in a little more territory in the following:

"There is beauty in the Beargrass,
In the Blue Grass meadow land,
In the Purchase and the region
Of the mountains, grim and grand;
But when God made old Kentucky
He left his sweetest smile
On this place of milk and honey,
Our own lovely Pennyrile."

Being of a romantic nature, it is only natural that his marriage to Miss Frances Rust, daughter of Professor J. W. Rust, long president of Bethel Woman's College, should be one of idyllic happiness. In the mind's eye of a very young boy, I carry a beautiful picture of Mr. and Mrs. Underwood as I saw them come and go in the Sunday School and church where we attended. He was ever the courteous and attentive beau, and she the charmed and adoring bride. It is no wonder then that the column gave him an appropriate medium of expression, and, on Valentine's Day, he wrote:

"MY VALENTINE"

Dear, that you love me, is a little song,
Deep in my heart;
It's melody a thing I may not share,
And those with whom I walk unaware
I stand apart,
Because you love me, radiant in the throng."

The lost art of AFTER DINNER speaking was quite in vogue in Mr. Underwood's time, and he was its master. As a result, he was in demand as a speaker and toastmaster, both at home and throughout the state. He never failed to charm his audiences. In this respect he had a friendly rival in the person of the late Charles M. Meacham, editor and publisher of the Hopkinsville KENTUCKIAN. Both were charter members of the Athenaeum, and at times the repartee between them was the source of much enjoyment to the members. On one occasion, whether at the Athenaeum or not I do not know, Mr. Meacham was presiding, and, in introducing Mr. Underwood, he stated that when Tom Underwood was present you could always depend on him for a speech, for all you had to do was to drop in a good meal and out would come the speech. Mr. Underwood bided his time, and then in the course of his remarks, he stated that he and Mr. Meacham had lately attended a possum supper. When the waiter insisted upon Mr. Meacham having a second helping, he replied, "No, thank you, George, that first helping seemed to go to my head". "That's right, Boss", the waiter answered, "them varmints sho' does haint them hollow places".

The Golf and Country Club and the game of golf were the subjects of frequent references. Mr. Underwood loved golf, but more he loved the association with his friends. It is no wonder then that frequently he would burst into song, as he did on this occasion.

"MUSIC"

"When the bees are softly humming
And the peckerwood is drumming

While an orchestra of mockers fills the breeze,
Could there be a finer treat, or
 Anything that's sweeter
Than sounds that fill the atmosphere like these?
Yep; it's lovely and delicious
As any one could wish us;
We wouldn't say a word against it, - but
We never yet have found
Quite as satisfying sound
As the thud in the cup of a 10-foot putt.
Perhaps some day on high
As we honk up to the sky
And cast aside life's burdens and all fears,
We'll hear St. Peter say:
"Come, for you the harps will play;
Oh! Listen to the music of the spheres."
We'll drink it in awhile
And, reminiscent, smile,
And to ourselves will gently mutter, "Tut;"
Of course it's mighty fine
And yet we must opine
We'd rather hear the thud of the 10-foot putt.

Tournaments with Clarksville and visits to the Golf Club in that city were enjoyable events and always made interesting reading. On this particular visit, the results were not such as to bring forth a poetic

outburst, so we find the writer reverting to prose as we read:

"A Perfect Day"

Cordiality as melting as the rays of the sun in the fleckless sky marked the joyous day spent Thursday with the members of the Clarksville Country Club. The ladies were out in full force and saw to it that the visitors had the time of their lives. Golf and bridge consumed the afternoon, and in the evening a sumptuous dinner was spread. Dancing on the mirror like floor 'til the wee sma' hours. Home.

Who beat? Who cares! You don't talk about who beats eating, do you? Golf's a feast. You don't boast that you pray better than anybody else. Golf's a rite. You don't brag that you sing the doxology faster than the man in the next pew. Golf is concord. But if you are mean enough to press the questions and the bitter truth must be told, and you want to gloat of the misfortune of your own town, buy yourself today's LEAF-CHRONICLE and enjoy yourself."

In hallowed, but nostalgic words, the column reported the burning of the Cerulean Hotel under date of August 31, 1925.

"Lamely and haltingly we touch the keys of this typewriter in forming some sentences concerning Cerulean, bereft of its pride and glory; one should have a goose-quill to be dipped into lavender ink softened with a tear.

The happy memories of near-forgotten days cluster about the ruins of the rambling old white frame building smoldering in cinders; a part of the ashes should be deposited by tender hands in an urn of gold."

"IN DAYS OF OLD"

"Cerulean! The very name conjures up joyous recollections, and one hums unconsciously, 'How dear to my heart are the scenes of my childhood.' Ay, when the evil day came not. Cerulean! Trysting place of lovers, rendezvous of romance, a haven of serenity, peace, tranquility; where the air was full of sulphur and smiles.

Cerulean, where Southern cooking had faultless expression, with its famous fried chickens three times a day, piled high in platters, and nobody had to be content with a neck or a wing. 'Bosoms and legs for everybody,' as Ed Lindsay used to say, with sly similes anent fair visitors. Cerulean, where the soup was melted music and the shervert frozen song. All served country style, and nobody had a jaded appetite."

But speaking of fried chicken reminds us that our "Jotter" must have loved quail also, for we find this cogent bit of verse:

"A Lyric"

11-24-20

"To Douglas Hancock

Where are the quail you promised us Douglas,
tender and true?

Tough we'll say you are and false;

Such faith we put in you;
Three long years have rolled away
Since first you made that vow;
Our plate was empty then, Dear Doug
And it is empty now."

It must have paid off, for a few days later we find the
sequel:

"Say, Orpheus, lend us your lyre
Or did you toot a flute
Bend low, O ye celestial choir
In ecstasy be mute
As we in song to Douglas dear
Retract them crool words
'Twas worth the wait of a triple year
To lamp that mass of birds,
We found 'em when we went to dine,
Like Douglas they were fat and fine."

It was during prohibition days, and the noble experiment was
the butt of many jokes. The opportunities were too good to be passed
up, so he wrote, evidently on the first night of prohibition:

"Everything Closed
"Where is my wandering boy tonight,
Where, oh, where can he be;
There ain't no place he can go no more
In this land of the brave and the free."

Or maybe you like this one --

"Home brewing is the life for me
But, pray don't tell the cops
I'll get a lot of bullfrogs, See
To furnish me with Hops."

Or this one -

First Citizen:

"Got a pint o'white mule and a whisk broom today."

Second Citizen:

"Whatcha got a whisk broom for?"

First Citizen:

"To brush myself off with when I get up.

This one I also liked.

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"Telephone rings:

'Ting-a-ling-a-ling!'

And George C. Abbitt took down the receiver
and placed it to his ear.

'Is that the Dickel Liquor Company?' a woman
asked.

'No,' he replied in stern reproof, recognizing
the voice of one of his parishioners,

'It is your rector'

Was there a dull thud? NO -

'Indeed', said the lady quick as a flash,

'And what are you doing there.'"

Parodies were an especial gift of the jotter, and we cannot
refrain from reading two of them which we thought particularly clever.

This one, with apologies to Kipling, was entitled:

"Spring Cleaning"

"When earth's last picture is dusted,
And the floors are painted and dried.
When the oldest carpet is beaten
And the youngest spider has died -
We shall rest, and faith we shall need it;
Lie down for a moment or two
Till the dust on the grand piano
Shall set us to work anew."

As an excuse for paraphrasing Leigh Hunt, he made this explanation:

"Beatrice, you winked at me, and in your eyes
were twinkles,
Alas! I wonder could you see my gray hair
and my wrinkles,
That surely wasn't why you smiled, O, no,
romance was meant;
I'm past philandering, my child, but thank
you for the compliment."

GIRLS: Is there anyone who does not like to read about girls? Well, Mr. Underwood liked to write about them. Here are just a few samples:

"CANNED GOODS"

"Where are the girls of yesteryear
Who used no powder, paint or bleaches?
Listen, and I will tell you, dear:
They are evaporated peaches."

But some will like this better.

"THE SUMMER GIRL"

"The summer girl is here today

In filmy drape

The sun shines brightly that we may

Behold her shape."

Or maybe this is your style:

"THE VAMP"

"A vampire hath a gaze intense,

She doesn't think or read much

Some say she has but little sense -

But then, she doesn't need much."

Or this will surely please:

"A MODERN EVE"

"A bit of tulle,
A yard of silk,
A little skin
As white as milk
A little strap,
How dare she breathe,
A little cough -
Good evening, Eve."

Lives there a man with a soul so dead that he has never felt like bursting into song on a beautiful day in spring. It must have been on such a day when Mr. Underwood gave expression to his feelings as he wrote this beautiful bit of verse entitled -

MAY

"The tender buds are springing,

The woods are all awake;

The merry birds are singing

And joy rings in the air;

The brook's low murmurs wake,
O world, thou art so wondrous fair,
In may time.
Oh, how the flowers are swinging,
All fondly in the sun;
How low the birds are winging,
Ah, would that I were one!
My joyful song should fill the air,
O world, thou art so wondrous fair . .
In may time."

Loving life as he did, and living it to the fullest, it is no wonder that Mr. Underwood wrote of many things. Christmas, the Circus, New Year, and many other subjects came under the spell of his gifted pen. But time does not permit us to read them all, but we cannot close without doing justice to one of his particular loves, the Pennyroyal Fair. Each year the fair came in for his special attention, but of them all, I liked this one best:

"LET'S GO"

"And now once more we have the fair;
With pickles on display,
And quilted goods and willow ware,
and hominy and hay.
The massive porker in his pen
Now makes his owner proud.
While Aunty's "Dominicker" hen
Attracts a goodly crowd.

It might well excite a clam
The running race in many heats
And father takes a prize with beets
And mother with her jam.
Prize butter and the biggest squash
And other things are there;
There is no better fun, by gosh,
Than the Pennyroyal Fair!"

The big social event of Pennyroyal Fair Week was the "Fair Hop," a dance attended by all the young (and old) for many miles around. On this particular occasion, a young lady from a neighboring city created a sensation by appearing on the ballroom in the first backless and strapless evening gown ever seen here. News of the added attraction spread like wildfire, and many of the older citizens who had already retired, upon receiving the news by phone, got up, dressed and went down to see the show. It remained for Mr. Underwood to give the incident its proper treatment, which he did, for, on the following day, the "Daily Jots" carried as its feature this appropriate bit of verse:

"THEN AND NOW"

"When Salmoe dance the shimmie
And a Baptist lost his head
Seven veils she donned to start with,
(Anyhow that's what is said.)
Nowadays in bareback dresses
O'er the floor the maidens flit,

Dressing up above the waist line

Like Salome when she quit."

But time had run its course. In the full enjoyment of life, while at the climax of his career, loved by, and loving his family and friends, he had reached the end of his earthly journey. Was it premonition - was it a foreboding - which prompted him to close the column for the last time with these prophetic lines:

"JUST A MINUTE"

"I have only just a minute,
Only sixty seconds in it,
Forced upon me - can't refuse it,
Didn't seek it, didn't choose it,
But it's up to me to use it,
I must suffer if I lose it,
Give account if I abuse it,
It is only but a minute,
But Eternity is in it."