

**By Special Delivery**

By  
**GEORGE ETHELBERG WALSH**

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**T**HE REV. SEXTUS WORTERLY gathered the loose sermon leaves in his hands and shoved them aside, not hastily or impatiently, but reluctantly, as though yielding to a temptation. The day was not suited to sermon composition.

The Rev. Sextus Worterly sighed heavily, sighed with the unconstrained freedom of a man who knows that he is alone.

There had been a time when the Reverend Sextus (no one had called him this for short except a defunct maiden aunt, who dared not approach nearer to familiarity than the compound name) was happy in his loneliness. "A man can do his best work when untrammelled by the responsibilities of family ties," he reasoned in those days.

Those pessimistic days had faded somewhat. The maiden aunt who had ministered to his few material wants in his household was only a memory now. A longing to hear lips abbreviate his name even to the extent of two words had possessed him lately. It was a species of madness that he did not acknowledge to himself. None ever suspected such weakness in the man of stiff broadcloth and high starched collar who so graciously and successfully filled the Daleville pulpit every Sunday.

Least of all, probably, did the gentle, demure soul of Widow Trimble, who in her own intense loneliness pitied the pastor into sympathetic creatures can. She had nurtured and guided two husbands through the winding pathway of married life, tearfully laying them, with the help of the Reverend Sextus in his capacity as officiating clergyman, beneath the sod when all earthly powers had failed to renew their lease of life. She was alone again, alone in her double bereavement, but seeking to give rather than requiring comfort.

Cynthia Trimble was a name to conjure with. It had a sweet, sonorous sound in verse and a subtle suggestion that the amorous mind could readily trace to all sources of beauty and loveliness. The Reverend Sextus had broken his fealty to a single, bachelor existence by falling in love with Cynthia. But he was not versed in the ways of the lover, and he shrank from the possibility of the recipient of his affections ever discovering his amorous inclinations.

Had the Reverend Sextus died yesterday there would have been no scrap of paper found in his possession today to indicate the slumbering of a great passion in his life, none—that is, there had been none—which could betray a lovesick soul, but within his inner pocket there was this day an epistle which had caused him to sigh and turn reluctantly from his sermonizing.

It was a proposal to Cynthia, which he had indited after much painful thought and elaboration. If ever the time should come when he could find the courage to speak he would repeat the contents of this letter. Its diction was faultless, its confession earnest, but not too affectionate, its wording to the point and not too verbose. It was a masterpiece of its kind.

But it was never intended to be delivered. The Reverend Sextus had not



HE PLACED IT WITHIN HIS INNER POCKET, composed it for that reason. No eyes other than his own should ever read it.

The proposal to Cynthia was the Rev. Sextus Worterly's masterpiece. It reflected his highest mental and spiritual expression. Today he read it over and over and reluctantly thought of the necessity of destroying it lest something should happen to reveal its secret.

But a moment later he placed it within his inner pocket. "I shall stroll awhile, and I may need it," he said as he excused his sudden change of mind.

Despite his threescore and five years, the Reverend Sextus was a man of strength and agility, a youth in all except years. He strode from his study and swung down the flower-scented lane with the easy grace and muscular power of a much younger man. He loved to wander afield seeking new sights in distant pastures and communing with nature in all her many perplexing moods.

Today he rather strained a point.

When he rested in a deep wood he was many miles from home, with the noon hour approaching. It was delightfully cool and retiring in the woods. There was no house within three miles of his dell. On all sides were the shadows of a great wood.

Great was his surprise to hear voices anon stilling the sounds of the woods and hushing the warbling of his feathered friends. The Reverend Sextus turned to greet the newcomers, wondering not a little at their strange appearance. Shaggy of beard, unkempt and unclean of body and clothes, they appeared out of all harmony with the scene.

"Ah, Shaggy, we have something here," spoke one of them, with a twang in his accent. "What d'ye call it? Somethin' broke loose from the plecter." Shaggy pushed his companion in the background, replying: "Ye don't understand yer bishness, Pete. It's me ole friend' what gave me a lift when I wuz a youngster. He's a minister. Ain't you?"

The Rev. Sextus Worterly rose with dignified slowness from his seat on a log and made reply as befitting his position in life:

"You surprise me at your rudeness. It pains me exceedingly to see you in your present plight."

"Jest what I was tellin' me pard," Shaggy made sharp reply, advancing. "It's painful to be broke, an' we're sick of it. We've cum to ask ye to help us."

"I should be only too glad under ordinary circumstances to lend assistance to you, but the suspicious appearance of things compels me to—"

"Ye shouldn't suspect honest men jest because they happen to be down on their luck. Now, see here, if you wuz"—

The man seated himself on the log which the aged minister had just vacated, but Pete suddenly pushed forward and growled:

"I ain't got no time fer yer tomfoolery, Shaggy. Ye can sit here an' talk with the old gent all day, but I'm off after I get what he's holdin' in his pockets. Come, old men, shell out!"

Pete had thrust a hand into the pocket of the affrighted and dumfounded minister, and while he was rifling it the Reverend Sextus gasped aloud:

"Do I understand that this is highway robbery—that I'm a victim of footpads, of common thieves?"

Unresistingly up to this time the victim of the holdup had permitted them to extract from his pockets all that they contained, but at the sight of the letter addressed to Cynthia his whole manner underwent a marked change. He clutched the hand that profanely held the love epistle.

"Not that!" he said. "All else, but not that!"

"An' why not?" demanded Pete. "It must be valuable if ye set so much store by it."

He fung the detaining hand from him and held the letter above his head. The Reverend Sextus lost his balance and rolled in the dust and leaves. When he recovered himself the two men were moving away, counting their cash and—yes, reading his epistle to Cynthia.

The men cast a leering grimace over their shoulders. Pete held the letter aloft and jeered. "We'll see that she gets it. We'll take it up to her or mail it if we don't have the time. By-by!"

When the men disappeared as suddenly as they had presented themselves, with the leafy foliage inclosing them so that they were lost to sight and hearing, the agonized minister lifted his hands and head in a mute appeal to heaven for justice. The tears welled from his eyes; the lines of his face deepened; his limbs trembled and shook as though stricken with palsy.

The sonnet and epistle writing habit had at last born its bitter fruits! Cynthia would in one moment know all, and through such a source! To have common tramps to deliver a letter of proposal to her was too humiliating. She who had won and held the love of two noble husbands must view with scorn and contempt such a profane abuse of a privilege.

The minister brushed his clothes of the leaves and twigs as he hurried through the narrow path leading back to Daleville. An hour later he stepped briskly, if somewhat uncertainly, up the gravelly path leading to Cynthia Trimble's pretty cottage. She was there on the porch to receive him. For once he did not see her welcoming smile or the curves of the plump cheeks or the mantling flush of the brow.

"It's a pleasant day," she greeted afar off, rising to meet him.

The Reverend Sextus panted with his exertion. He dropped into a seat on the porch and gasped:

"The letter! Have you received it?" She smiled eagerly and shook her head. "I have received no letter. What letter is it?"

A crafty expression entered the darkening eyes of the minister. He hesitated and stammered: "The letter—ah, yes, what letter? I forgot. You did not know."

"No, I did not know," she murmured. "But I'm anxious to know."

"I—I cannot tell you now," he stammered. "Some day—yes, some day—I will tell you."

Then, thinking of the tramps and their threat to mail it if they had no time to deliver it, he added: "But if the letter comes you will—will let me know and—not read it?"

There he was treading upon a woman's ground, and Cynthia knew her prerogative. She shrugged her shoulders and answered: "Yes; if it comes I'll tell you."

"And you'll not read it?" She shrugged her shoulders again and looked away.

"I saw two tramps go by here a short time ago," she said. "They seemed in a great hurry. I wonder if they have been doing some mischief."

The Rev. Sextus Worterly was a close reader of character, and he studied her face suspiciously until he was assured of her innocence.

Then the Reverend Sextus rose to go, murmuring to himself:

"They do not intend to deliver it in person. It is by mail they will send it. I'm safe for the night."

When he wended his way homeward his thoughts were confused, bitterness mixed with a strange sensation of elation. Should she receive the letter it was a satisfaction to know that it was properly worded. He doubted if either of her former husbands could have penned such another note.

But immediately following his elation at this reflection he shuddered, and a cold perspiration broke out on his forehead. If she did not love him—what presumption on his part! No, the letter must not be delivered!

That night he tried to bribe the postman on his route to rob the mail—that is, to secure back his letter to Cynthia.

"It's against the law, sir," severely answered the honest postman. "But, seeing it was your letter first, I—what kind of handwriting was it in?"

"It—I—don't know. You see, it was addressed by—by—"

The postman shook his head. "Couldn't do it, sir, for anybody. It would land me in jail. Sorry, sir."

On many mornings thereafter he visited Cynthia, with always the same query framed on his lips. "The letter—has it come yet?"

No, the letter had not come by post or by tramp delivery. And each succeeding day the Reverend Sextus gained back some of his former poise and self-confidence. But the necessity of making the inquiry before he began a day's work on his sermon grew into a fixed habit which he could not cast off.

It was a pleasant habit too. It inspired him for the duty of the day. He grew



"THE LETTER AT LAST!" SHE EXCLAIMED.

fonder of inquiring about the letter than of making metaphors and similes for his discourses for the Sabbath day. The poison of the temptation entered his blood and grew with insidious rapidity. He did not realize it until a fortnight after the holdup in the woods.

Then like a flash of inspiration it dawned upon his mind. He was seeking Cynthia's society not for the sake of the letter, but for the pleasure of her company. He had been deceiving himself all these days, weaving a web of delusion around his life that was as dangerous as the temptation of the drunkard. He was drunk—drunk with the wine of love.

He groaned in spirit and beat himself with mental castigation. He was worse than the hypocrite who deceived the world, but he was honest to himself. Not in all his days had he yielded to such sin and fallen to such depths, and when he gazed up at the heavens again he had a new light of determination in his eyes. His hands were clenched. It was the beatific expression of the reformer which shone on his face. He would pay the penalty of his sin in sorrow and when he reached the porch of his beloved's home he was a sad and quieter man, with thoughts on things spiritual rather than material. No words about the letter escaped his lips. His walk and smile were sedately solemn.

But there was no reciprocating mood to greet him. Cynthia Trimble was alive with happiness and coy delight. She held aloft a letter. Its whiteness was not more snowlike in its purity than her hand.

"The letter at last!" she exclaimed. "Why do you not ask for it? See!"

The Rev. Sextus Worterly turned pale, and his jaw dropped with an ominous click; his hands clutched his side.

"Did you think it would never come?" she asked, fingering it lovingly. "But the writing is—wonderful. I would hardly know that it was!"

She looked up, for the groan was the

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groan of one in distress. "My sins have found me out—found me out!"

"Was there anything in the letter that—that you regret saying?" she asked softly. He looked at her. Her face was delicately tinged with red. The eyes were shining brightly. One shaft from them unnerved him. He forgot his resolutions, his temptation, his sin.

"No; nothing that I regret. It was all true."

Then as she picked absentmindedly at the letter he added: "The letter! Now that it has come give it to me."

She shrank back shudderingly and replied: "No; it is mine. I must keep it. I—I shall always treasure it."

The Reverend Sextus gazed mutely at her, his mind aflame with love. "And you are not offended?" he said slowly.

She answered with restraint, but with eyes full bent upon him: "No, no. Why should I be offended?"

"Then—and the words came slowly—"then my sin is not—not a sin. I feared it would offend you. But if it has not my love must find some response in you, Cynthia. The letter has not been without avail."

A few minutes later he touched her hand and said: "But the letter, Cynthia. You will give it to me now."

"No, no; never!" she protested. "It is mine, mine always. I cannot give it up."

"As you say, dear," he responded, while the pride of a newborn idea entered his bosom. It was sweet to have another cherish his composition.

"And you will call me Reverend Sextus—no, Sextus—simply Sextus?" he added.

"Yes, Sextus—Sextus, dear," she made answer as she tried to conceal the letter in the folds of her dress.

But the letter! It was not given to him. When the Reverend Sextus left Cynthia gazed at the illusive epistle, with its faded chirography, and mused softly: "He didn't know the difference, and what's the harm? I thought as much. And it was a proposal, after all. I wonder what he said."

And she sighed for the impossible, for his letter had not been delivered.

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**VIA TYRONE—WESTWARD.**  
Leave Bellefonte 9:55 a. m. week-days, arrive at Tyrone 11:45 a. m., Altoona 1:30 p. m., Pittsburgh 5:55 p. m. week-days, arrive at Tyrone 2:10 p. m., Altoona 3:10 p. m., Pittsburgh 6:55 p. m. daily, arrive at Tyrone 6:50 p. m., Altoona 8:55 p. m., Pittsburgh 10:45 p. m.

**VIA TYRONE—EASTWARD.**  
Leave Bellefonte 9:55 a. m. week-days, arrive at Tyrone 11:05 a. m., Harrisburg 2:35 p. m., Philadelphia 5:47 p. m.  
Leave Bellefonte 1:55 p. m. week-days, arrive at Tyrone 2:10 p. m., Harrisburg 5:35 p. m., Philadelphia 10:47 p. m. daily, arrive at Tyrone 6:00 p. m., Harrisburg 10:50 p. m., Philadelphia 4:23 a. m.

**VIA LOCK HAVEN—WESTWARD.**  
Leave Bellefonte 9:55 a. m. week-days, arrive at Lock Haven 11:30 a. m.; leave Williamsport 12:55 p. m.; arrive at Harrisburg 2:20 p. m., Philadelphia 6:23 p. m.  
Leave Bellefonte 1:55 p. m. week-days, arrive at Lock Haven 2:10 p. m.; leave Williamsport 2:55 p. m.; arrive at Harrisburg 5:00 p. m., Philadelphia 7:52 p. m.  
Leave Bellefonte 5:15 p. m. week-days, arrive at Lock Haven 6:15 p. m.; leave Williamsport 7:35 a. m., arrive at Harrisburg 4:15 a. m., Philadelphia 7:17 a. m.

**VIA LEWISBURG.**  
Leave Bellefonte 6:40 a. m. week-days, arrive at Lewisburg 9:55 a. m., Montandon 9:15 a. m., Harrisburg 11:30 a. m., Philadelphia 3:17 p. m.  
Leave Bellefonte 2:00 p. m. week-days, arrive at Lewisburg 4:35 p. m., Montandon 4:45 p. m., Harrisburg 7:50 p. m., Philadelphia 10:47 p. m.

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STATIONS.	STATIONS.	STATIONS.	STATIONS.
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6:30 10 20 30	Belleville	8:45 12 50 5:30	Belleville
6:30 10 20 30	Coleville	8:45 12 50 6:10	Coleville
6:30 10 20 30	Morrisville	8:45 12 50 6:07	Morrisville
6:30 10 20 30	Whitmer	8:45 12 50 6:03	Whitmer
6:40 10 20 30	Lime Centre	8:50 12 50 6:00	Lime Centre
6:50 10 20 30	Hunters	8:50 12 50 6:00	Hunters
6:50 10 20 30	Pittsburg	8:50 12 50 6:00	Pittsburg
6:50 10 20 30	Brially	8:50 12 50 6:00	Brially
7:00 10 20 30	Waddle	8:50 12 50 6:00	Waddle
7:12 10 20 30	Krumpholtz	8:50 12 50 6:00	Krumpholtz
7:25 11 10	State College	8:50 12 50 6:00	State College
7:27	Struble	8:50 12 50 6:00	Struble
7:27	Bloomer	8:50 12 50 6:00	Bloomer
7:35	Finch Grove	8:50 12 50 6:00	Finch Grove

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