

Some years ago, when I was the Editor of a Correspondence Column, I used to receive heart-broken letters from young men asking for advice and sympathy. They found themselves the object of marked attentions from girls which they scarcely knew how to deal with. They did not wish to give pain or to seem indifferent to a love which they felt was as ardent as it was disinterested, and yet they felt that they could not bestow their hands where their hearts had not spoken. They wrote to me fully and frankly, and as one soul might write to another for relief. I accepted their confidences as under the pledge of a secrecy, never divulging their disclosures beyond the circulation of my newspapers, or giving any hint of their identity other than printing their names and addresses and their letters in full. But I may perhaps without dishonour reproduce one of these letters, and my answer to it, inasmuch as the date is now months ago, and the softening hand of Time has woven its roses--how shall I put it?--the mellow haze of reminiscences has--what I mean is that the young man has gone back to work and is all right again.

Here then is a letter from a young man whose name I must not reveal, but whom I will designate as D. F., and whose address I must not divulge, but will simply indicate as Q. Street, West.

"Dear Mr. Leacock,

"For some time past I have been the recipient of very marked attentions from a young lady. She has been calling at the house almost every evening, and has taken me out in her motor, and invited me to concerts and the theatre. On these latter occasions I have insisted on her taking my father with me, and have tried as far as possible to prevent her saying anything to me which would be unfit for father to hear. But my position has become a very difficult one. I do not think it right to accept her presents when I cannot feel that my heart is hers. Yesterday she sent to my house a beautiful bouquet of American Beauty roses addressed to me, and a

magnificent bunch of Timothy Hay for father. I do not know what to say. Would it be right for father to keep all this valuable hay? I have confided fully in father, and we have discussed the question of presents. He thinks that there are some that we can keep with propriety, and others that a sense of delicacy forbids us to retain. He himself is going to sort out the presents into the two classes. He thinks that as far as he can see, the Hay is in class B. Meantime I write to you, as I understand that Miss Laura Jean Libby and Miss Beatrix Fairfax are on their vacation, and in any case a friend of mine who follows their writings closely tells me that they are always full.

"I enclose a dollar, because I do not think it right to ask you to give all your valuable time and your best thought without giving you back what it is worth."

On receipt of this I wrote back at once a private and confidential letter which I printed in the following edition of the paper.

"My dear, dear Boy,

"Your letter has touched me. As soon as I opened it and saw the green and blue tint of the dollar bill which you had so daintily and prettily folded within the pages of your sweet letter, I knew that the note was from someone that I could learn to love, if our correspondence were to continue as it had begun. I took the dollar from your letter and kissed and fondled it a dozen times. Dear unknown boy! I shall always keep that dollar! No matter how much I may need it, or how many necessaries, yes, absolute necessities, of life I may be wanting, I shall always keep *that* dollar. Do you understand, dear? I shall keep it. I shall not spend it. As far as the *use* of it goes, it will be just as if you had not sent it. Even if you were to send me another dollar, I should still keep the first one, so that no matter how many you sent, the recollection of one first friendship would not be contaminated with mercenary considerations. When I say dollar, darling, of

course an express order, or a postal note, or even stamps would be all the same. But in that case do not address me in care of this office, as I should not like to think of your pretty little letters lying round where others might handle them.

"But now I must stop chatting about myself, for I know that you cannot be interested in a simple old fogey such as I am. Let me talk to you about your letter and about the difficult question it raises for all marriageable young men.

"In the first place, let me tell you how glad I am that you confide in your father. Whatever happens, go at once to your father, put your arms about his neck, and have a good cry together. And you are right, too, about presents. It needs a wiser head than my poor perplexed boy to deal with them. Take them to your father to be sorted, or, if you feel that you must not overtax his love, address them to me in your own pretty hand.

"And now let us talk, dear, as one heart to another. Remember always that if a girl is to have your heart she must be worthy of you. When you look at your own bright innocent face in the mirror, resolve that you will give your hand to no girl who is not just as innocent as you are and no brighter than yourself. So that you must first find out how innocent she is. Ask her quietly and frankly--remember, dear, that the days of false modesty are passing away--whether she has ever been in jail. If she has not (and if *you* have not), then you know that you are dealing with a dear confiding girl who will make you a life mate. Then you must know, too, that her mind is worthy of your own. So many men to-day are led astray by the merely superficial graces and attractions of girls who in reality possess no mental equipment at all. Many a man is bitterly disillusioned after marriage when he realises that his wife cannot solve a quadratic equation, and that he is compelled to spend all his days with a woman who does not know that x

squared plus $2xy$ plus y squared is the same thing, or, I think nearly the same thing, as x plus y squared.

"Nor should the simple domestic virtues be neglected. If a girl desires to woo you, before allowing her to press her suit, ask her if she knows how to press yours. If she can, let her woo; if not, tell her to whoa. But I see I have written quite as much as I need for this column. Won't you write again, just as before, dear boy?"

"STEPHEN LEACOCK."