

1570

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Letters to my neighbors No 1

Who is my neighbor? Luke X, 29.

To John Smith Esq.

My Dear Sir;

Before  
entitling my letter to you, I felt  
called upon to re-read with some  
care, that portion of the Holy Scriptures,  
wherein the Lord spake to His disci-  
ples these remarkable words, "Love thy  
neighbor as thyself." - and as I  
have thought upon its signifi-  
cance, the inquiry of the specula-  
tive lawyer has sprung to my  
lips and I have asked -

"Who is my neighbor?"

The parable which follows, as if in re-  
ply, seems to shed no light upon the  
matter at all. It is of course easy  
enough to say who was the neighbor  
of that poor devil, who fell among the  
thieves, my littlest boy John (a dimin-  
utive masculine of seven summers,  
and more given to large mouthfuls  
of cracklin-bread and 'rimmon head,  
than to scriptural exegesis), seems  
to be entirely clear upon this point.

When I read over the parable again, with great solemnity, and addressed the final interrogatory to him, he first wiped his usual promontory and his sleeve together, and an unctuous smile parted the ruby curtains of his mouth; disclosing the process of mastication in full blast within, as he replied: "The fellow that put grease and stickin'-plaster on his sores and paid his tavern-bill, of course!"

I reproved the youngsters duly, for the improper levity and jocularity of expression, and deplored the degeneracy of these modern times, deeply regretting those good old days when infant masculinity put on gentlemanhood with its first pair of bifurcations.

I called <sup>to</sup> the young dog's attention, the example of his country's paternal ancestor, the exemplary George, who in his tender years measured out with such strict propriety those immortal cadences.

"Father, I can't tell a lie!"

G. W. aged 10 years

As a father, you may imagine how I was shocked to hear the incorrigible

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young sea-captain exclaims —

"Well, Pop, don't you s'pose he told a whopper for them!"

With impetuous sorrow, not without an admixture of anger, I turned away knowing that reproach would be wasted upon a child of so little sensibility; I certainly wonder how he can have acquired such coarseness of manners and speech. I have taken the utmost pains both with his morals and his diction, yet both seem to be rapidly becoming deplorable. I have an idea Mr Smith that association with your lay-brother does not tend to improve him.

— But John went off and I fell to meditating upon his answer and I thought there was something of philosophy in it. Favours conferred evidently constituted the distinguishing feature of the neighborhood between the Samaritan and the unfortunate individual who fell into lascivious society during his attempted progression from Jerusalem to Jericho. Even that young Blackguard John declared it to be "as clear as mud" however clear that may be.

For instance, your illustrious namesake John Smith of "Jerusalem" I adopt this orthography because the custom of the

country should govern the pronunciation and I wish my readers to pronounce correctly, (which I am satisfied that the usage of the mother country where we should look for "English undefiled" justifies this pronunciation) John Smith, of <sup>Georgetown</sup> ought to have known his proper relations to the very distinguished ancestress of so many of "the proud sons of Virginia." I do not ~~know~~ think however that your namesake had very carefully considered this parable. If he had he could never have forgotten the moment when that wild flower of the wood, the fragrance of whose loving devotion comes to us sweet and pure despite the mold and must of time, cast herself upon his bosom on the block of sacrifice, twined her brown arms about his neck, and made her beauty and her love the shield of his life. He would ever have remembered that holiest neighborship which this purling act should have established between them, whereby the life which she had redeemed from destruction should have been consecrated to her service in that new life when, born again through the fervency of her love, she cast aside the savagery of her pines and adorned herself with the amenities of his people and his religion. She saved him from the sacrificial block, to become herself a sacrifice to one more savage, selfish and unrelenting.

than the heathen Pocahontas. I hope Mr. Smith  
 it is no offense, but I consider your name=  
 sake, John Smith of Jermestown, to have been  
 a thorough scoundrel and not fit to have been  
 any body's neighbor. It is true he had decency  
 enough not to work the ruin of the poor love=  
 wail, whose devotion was more priceless than  
 all the fancied wealth of that Orint which  
 he sought; whose love would have been to his  
 war-worn hulk a perennial garland of youth  
 crowning his last years with a beauty and a  
 glory which those before had never known.  
 But John Smith, of that ilk, was a gentle=  
 man because, commanding one of His  
 Majesty's letters of marque, and possessing  
 I suppose, not a little of that pride of birth  
 and station and perhaps something of that anx=  
 iety to preserve those "distinctions on account  
 of color" which her descendants so strenu=  
 ously insist upon in theory and so studious=  
 ly ignore in practice. Instead of being right  
 body he put in a substitute, a milk-and=  
 water "goodly" part of a man, as near as I  
 could ever learn, to fill the aching void in  
 the heart of the young forest princess, and  
 mock the burning love which all death's ter=  
 rors could not daunt. Your namesake Mr.  
 Smith, ought not to have found any neighbor  
 when he fell among them. And in any

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opinion Mr King Pocohattan, ought to have beaten out his brains before Pocahontas had an opportunity to become infatuated with him.

Wherever therefore favor has been conferred it is easy enough to determine who is the neighbor of the recipient, but how about the donor? Who is his neighbor?

Here undoubtedly, the Master intended that we should apply another beautiful principle of obligation. His word is the blessedness of giving! The relationship of neighbor, so far as it arises from the actual conferrence of obligation, is mutual. As the good Samaritan became the "neighbor" of the unfortunate traveller to Jericho by reason of his kindly act, so did the victim of the thieves become the "neighbor" of the Samaritan, because "it is more blessed to give than to receive."

And so throughout the world, the mutual obligation of neighborship exists whenever favor is conferred. Between donor and recipient, between lender and borrower, between creditor and debtor, between obligor and obligee, as the lawyers phrase it, in innumerable relations and extending through labyrinthine mazes of human action, thought and feeling extends that frail but certain clue that guides to truth and pigh the mutuality of neighborship.

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Like a silver network it stretches from man to man binding one at every intersection of its gleaming threads.

But how, you wish to know does even this broad definition of neighborship allow me to use toward you such freedom of address as to indite to you these letters? You insist that no mutuality of obligation exists between us, that you are not my debtor and am glad that I am not yours. So am I, neighbor for I have no idea that you would be an obliging creditor, and my house would soon be more easily distinguished by the mortgage upon it than by its present new coat of paint. But to lay jesting aside, do you think there was no neighborship established when I turned that infamous pole of yours thirteen times out of my "crack" field of wheat without shooting her, and that too when she had scaled a fence which I regarded as impassable by any fera domestica, and was known to have fed and fattened in every cornfield within a range of ten miles from your door? How I remember when the wheat was just ripening under the fervid summer sun, one sultry morning when every servant on the plantation was beyond hail, seeing from my chamber window that porcine she-devil (you will excuse my warmth for I had a warm time

with her approach the fence which surround-  
 ed that "Golden Isle" set in an emerald green <sup>sea</sup>  
 my wheat patch in the clover lot. I knew  
 her afar off, for she is a "notable" sow, the  
 veteran of unnumbered battles and covered  
 with scars. It cannot be said that she  
 has any distinguishable ear mark. Neither  
 "holes" "swallow-tails" "clips" nor "craps" adorn  
 her auricular appendages. Your customary  
 "two clips and an under crap" was nowhere  
 to be seen about her head. So far as that was  
 concerned, you might have been deprived of  
 her valuable possession without being able to  
 prove the identity of her corpse, had it been  
 discovered. There was no mistaking that sow  
 however. Her long, thin body well up, on  
 legs as lithe and symmetrical as a deer's, white  
 with black spots, showing traces of a remote  
 Berkshire pedigree which the necessities of a wild  
 life in the swamps and on the hills of Carolina  
 and innumerable generations of hard living  
 had so degraded <sup>that</sup> its valuable features have  
 almost been lost and the animal reduced  
 very nearly to the type of primal wildness.  
 The prolonged snout, as sharp and solid as  
 a moirator's prow, adorned on either side with  
 tusks which the forest monarch might well  
 envy, ~~was~~ scarred and furrowed like the beam  
 of some old battle ship. Upon the forehead



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side was a fearful scar where Duncan's black boy Dick had buried the bit of his axe in ~~her~~ <sup>her</sup> Jowl. I have heard, that in that conflict she lost one of her ears and left two of Duncan's dogs hors du combat. Her dexter luminary had been eclipsed by a rifle ball, which by some strange chance (never to be revealed unless by the curious scrutiny of some butcher's boys post mortem inquest) missed her brain and left her eye single to the salient points of every fence in the vicinage. But it is useless to attempt a specification of the vestiges which a thousand triumphant conflicts have left upon this first and greatest of the svinish amazons. In brief she stood "in all her Gorgon terrors clad", one-eyed, without an ear, bereft of tail and worse peared than the front of Mars himself, prospecting on the knoll beyond that field of wheat.

Clad in the aridish of summer costume, forsaking for a moment the intricacies of "complaint" and "answer", I sought my library window to woo a breath of coolness, and espied the foe. As I said, I knew her at sight, and I knew too that trouble had come. Twelve times she had penetrated the chevaux de frise with which I had sought to guard my treasure. Bitterly was I tempted, neighbor, to take down the

barrelled Ballard, which hangs yonder and  
 draw a bead on her surviving "feeder". Bar-  
 ring her wonderful good luck you know  
 enough of my marksmanship to enable you  
 to estimate the chances of survivorship on  
 her part had I done so. But I resisted  
 the temptation and in an agony of soul  
 awaited the development of events. Satisfied  
 apparently of the barrenness of the land so  
 far as resistance was concerned, she moved  
 rapidly to the attack, at first in the lateral  
 style, for which her race is proverbial and  
 then "head on at full speed," like a gun-boat  
 charging a raft. With systematic gravity,  
 she reared against the fence inserted her  
 wonderful proboscis, lever-like between the  
 fourth and fifth rails, curled up her outer  
 limbs, and deliberately "lubber lifted"  
 for a hole. Either the staunchness of the post  
 the weight of the rails, or the lightness of her  
 horns made this attack a failure. I saw her  
 as she snapped her tusks, and shook her scrag-  
 gly pate in evident desecification. I rejoiced  
 it was too soon. She was foiled merely, not  
 baffled. Do you remember that sharp angle  
 where my fence joins our neighbor's? Thus,  
 after a moment's meditation went the sow  
 with a foot upon each side like a rat run-  
 ning up a corner, up went the sow, up

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to the very top, took one more look — if I  
showered maledictions on her — I hope I may  
be forgiven — jumped inside down into the  
clouds and started in a contented trot for the  
wheat. No time was to be lost. Bareheaded  
and slippered, in the glory of white pants et  
cetera, of professional leisure, out I rushed  
into the meadow, under the broiling sun,  
with my staunch old Newfoundland, and  
a war-club outrivalling the knotty one  
which Powhatan held in suspense over  
the head of your distinguished namesake.  
Ex instanti "the chard" ~~made~~ "sighted us"  
and "made sail" "slap" into the middle of  
the wheat. I tried to "fire across her bows  
with a five pound flint-rock, to "bring her  
to" but being somewhat out of breath with  
my sudden "spurt" and my aim being dis-  
concerted by the rapidity of my motion, it  
fell short and merely "dropped under her  
stern" harmless. My faithful dog gave chase.  
On and on, trampling the golden wheat-stalks  
"regardless of expense", rushed the bristling  
and shaggy dog. In the very middle where  
the growth was rankest, the pair turned  
at bay. I knew by the sound that the conflict  
there was sharp and fierce. I laid on the dog  
and started toward the spring under the pine  
tree. A run after an unruly sow, with the

~~young~~ thermometer at ninety-eight, is too much for my dignity and adipose development. I had almost reached the cooling shade when a grunt, a roar and a rush behind me, caused me to face to the rear, when I perceived that the scene of "active operations" had suddenly changed. Out of the wheat <sup>at full speed</sup> with spines erected and his eyes flashing with demoniac fury came the cow, in a straight line for the spring, and suck and suck with her, first on one side and then on the other came the great Newfoundland, seeking vainly for a point of attack. His white teeth slipped over her scraggy pate and snapped like a steel-trap where her ears should have been. All in vain the poor fellow was in despair. How could he worry a dog without auriculars. He was evidently becoming discouraged. I was just in her pathway, half down the hill to the spring. I grasped my warclub determined to do valiant things. I am afraid neither that if my blood had fallen as I intended, there would have been an end, then and there, to that cow. As she came, prying no heed to me, except to lower her head a trifle as she came near. When about three feet from me by careful estimation. I deluged my blow. It was intended for the right

side of her head, half way between the ear and eye. A dull thud followed — I have an indistinct impression that my club rattled harmless from her impregnable ribs. There was a sharp pain in my dexter leg, and the next moment I was off the perpendicular and pushing through space, face downward and feet forward, with a fleeting sea of green leaves and purple flower heads beneath me and clutching desperately with either hand a mass of wiry bristles. I was on the back of that infernal she-porker facing toward the normal location of the caudal appendage, (of which unfortunately she was innocent) where she was going or how long she would go, I knew not. The dog, who had given over his nuptial for an ear, probably in search for a tail, had fastened on my hand. Past the spring went the sow with me upon her back and the dog in tow, straight into the swamp-hole below. I had no idea whether, what a deposit of mud I had there until I found myself floundering in its oozy blackness, with that sow and dog fighting over me. Gasping, kicking, struggling, with the black tarry mud striking into my hair, my eyes and nose, and constantly applying for passage down my throat. I was in horrid straits! Was the head of the house of

powers to be lost in that villainous, muck  
 bed? Was the bottomless pit more certainly  
 fathomless than this? Would the coroner's jury  
 return a verdict of felo de se, and my wife be  
 thereby the amount of the policy I had provided  
 to secure her a better mate, after my demise  
 should she incline to be consoled? Such  
 were my reflections, and still dog and sow rolled  
 and tramped and bit and scratched about  
 me. A hundred times, I verily believe I rais-  
 ed my poll above the inky surface, only to  
 have it again submerged. I began to question  
 seriously the probability of any inquest at all.  
 I thought I saw some millennial Agassiz  
 examining my fossilized osseous developments,  
 deciding my locus in the dim past, and, care-  
 fully scrutinizing the furrow which that cursed  
 sow's tusk had left upon my femoral shafts,  
 and announcing that some war-like missile,  
 in the days of this world's wickedness, had laid  
 me low. But there came a pause in the  
 conflict. Weariness had compelled an arm-  
 istice. I raised my head above the muck  
 and got a whiff or two of air. Cautiously  
 I approached ~~the~~ ~~approached~~ the bank. I was on  
 the neutral ground between the combatants.  
 Gathering hold of a tussock I rose, a part of  
 elbow Venus, from the inky foam of that  
 foul sea. The black mud had destroyed my

identity to both the combatants. The old Newfoundland uttered a frightened bark and made off to a safe distance. The sow well, as I <sup>chawed</sup> ~~chewed~~ the mud mire out of my eyes, I saw that sow give me a horrified stare, with her remaining visual, then turning with erected bristles and a whisk of that part where the tail ought to have been, and a frightened snort, she fled like the wind and has never been seen about the premises since. The dog barked at me all the way to the house, looking around incredulously when I called, but stoutly refusing to credit that lump of blackness with my familiar voice.

My wife — who had been reading Du Chailu — no sooner saw me, than she fled to a neighbors shouting — "The Gorilla! the Gorilla!" and fell into spasms from fright. I firmly believe that nothing but jumping in the cistern saved me from capture, as an escaped specimen of that curious bi-quadrupedal brute.

I leave ~~this~~ it to you, Mr Smith, if this does not give me a right to address you as "my neighbor."

If this is not sufficient I have only to plead that kindness of feeling which leadeth the true neighbor to "show mercy" unto his fellow-man, which is

now exists upon your part towards me, for I have not forgotten the kindly messages which came from you, when our young one seemed groping darkly, at the gateway of the tomb.

In consequence of this our neighborhood, I made bold therefore to propose to you the following:

If you will kill that old sow and not let another hog run wild for five years. I will give you the best pair of "Chester Whites" in my yard.

And of this I will speak farther in my next. Till then, farewell.

Yours neighborly

Joseph Jowers Jr

March 1<sup>st</sup> 1870



Letters to  
a Neighbor

Dear Neighbor,

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