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H.E. Ward Correspondence

Harold Edson Ward 1896-

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WARD. Harold Edson

Born at Bath, Maine, May 9, 1896
May 25, 1923.

Mr. Henry E. Dunnack,
State Librarian,
State House,
Augusta, Maine.

Dear Mr. Dunnack:

The enclosed is the outcome of your request for an autobiography of the author of the "Homespun Letters."

Because my comparatively short life (to date) has been lacking in "purple spots", as Kipling colorfully calls high lights, I have presented my story in a style intended to intrigue the reader's interest in a theme that is, in cold fact, pretty commonplace.

If the sketch is not dignified enough for your publication, or if it is too long, send it back and I'll get it into presentable form. Expect to have a passable photographic likeness of myself in about a week and will mail a print to you.

Sincerely,

[Signature]

Box 258,
Augusta, Maine.
Harold Edson Ward, the writer of the "Letters of a Homespun Legislator to His Wife", a humorous record of the doings of the Eighty-first Maine Legislature, was born in Bath, Maine, May 9, 1896.

Like hundreds of other children born in Bath he ran the gamut of the Bath public schools and, in 1915, was graduated from the Morse High School "with honor", a technical distinction having something to do with marks in studies.

Next came an intensive course of seven months at a Maine business college followed by a finishing process in hotel work in the Berkshire Hills and the Bermuda Islands.

This was in 1917 just at the time when Mr. Hohenzollen notified the world that all his submarine commanders were free lance artists and might be expected to spray torpedos around off New Bedford, Massachusetts, as well as in the North Sea. This bit of news changed the sea-going plans of many travelers so the literary father of Willie Fergitt came home from Bermuda with the rest of the bell boys, wine boys and waitresses.

His next position was a semi-home service affair that combined, to an unusual degree, physical and mental activity. It was keeping the time of some 50 riveting gangs scattered promiscuously over five torpedo boat destroyers under construction at the Bath Iron Works. The daily routine from keel to crow's nest, in tanks and through propellor tubes, under engines and inside smoke stacks, putting down in a book what the ever-changing combinations of men were doing and how much of it, did much to develop the destined author's memory and his power of observation. And impressed upon
him how quickly, with proper daily exercise, man can take on something of the agility of his arboreal precursors.

In July 1919 Mr. Ward changed his residence from Bath to Ayer, Massachusetts, (Camp Devens) where his previous mental and physical training soon raised him to the job of sergeant -- not a mess or supply sergeant but a real, whistle-blowing, gun-carrying sergeant. A few months later the Germans got on to the calibre of men that were training in the cantonments in this country and ran up the white flag.

So, after 10 months (five of incessant drilling and five of ignoble loafing respectively) a bronzed and war-ridden veteran was returned to public life where he resumed writing in a book the numbers of men, the jobs they were on and how long they were on them. But the war had got in its dastardly work and, within a few weeks, the boy was fired for incompetency, insubordination and allied disorders.

Then followed a dark brown period, 18 months to be exact, in which the humorist-to-be buried his pride and individuality in "holding on" the cold end of a hot iron bar while a sweating, swearing riveter on the other side of the ship's "shell" made the work as difficult and unpleasant as possible. After working at this job almost long enough to get the viewpoint of the average citizen of Moscow he became a "gun man" in his own right and carried around a pneumatic chipping hammer, 75 feet of hose and a tool box weighing anywhere from 20 to 100 pounds -- depending on the number of tools in it -- as gracefully as any of the older and stronger boys.

The recent unpleasantness across the water being ended, in a sense, Uncle Sam decided to spend less of his money for destroyers so, with
several hundred other uncouth, tobacco-chewing, rabble of the shipyards, the young man with a latent knack for writing was "laid off".

But his preparation in hotels, the shipyard and the army had fitted him for bigger things and, almost immediately he was engaged by a large publishing company in which organization he rose rapidly till, in January 1921, he became managing editor of the Maine Farmer, a publication that has been almost an agricultural bible to the ruralists of the Pine Tree State since 1832, which is several years back.

All the time genius was brewing inside him and one day it broke out in the form of a bulletin calling the attention of the workers in the plant to a party that they were going to have. Written in rube lingo, its tone was so pastoral that in being distributed around the building it gave off an odor that smelled for all the world like new-mown hay.

It came time for the Eighty-first Legislature to infest the State House and one of the executives of the Company called Ward and said, "Write something about the legislature for the Portland Press Herald in the same style as that bulletin." And the budding young humorist, feeling the stir of genius calling for expression, sat down and wrote the first of the "Letters of a Homespun Legislator to His Wife". And the executive said, "Write one of those every Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday." So whenever the muse was kind (and she invariably was on Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday) our author sat down and produced until the Governor and the veto-vaulting solons reached a point
where living together under the same roof was no longer possible.

Thus goes another story that throws into the scales of experience more evidence that successful authorship is attained only through a life of cumulative, laborious, untiring effort plus innate genius, shaken well before using.

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H. E. Ward's Book
Letters of a Homespun Legislator

They do say that "murder will out," but there are other things which although not being so serious, are just as mystifying. The author of "Letters of a Homespun Legislator to His Wife" has been discovered and is no less a person than Harold E. Ward of this city, managing editor of the Maine Farmer.

The letters, which have been printed from time to time in a Portland daily paper, have created a great deal of interest and amusement as well, especially among the Solons and others directly interested in Legislative matters. A kind sense of humor has seemed to govern the letters, which were discussions upon timely topics in the present session of the Maine Legislature. The "homespun" style certainly prevailed the stories, each letter being complete. Wit took place beside truth in the spinning of the yarn.

The letters have been collected and placed in book form by their author. The book has been placed available to the public. In the book are discovered many pen drawings, simple in design, yet effective, dealing upon the context of the letter. These pictures are also the handiwork of Mr. Ward.