

Westfield Ohio
August 3, 1902.

Dear people at home:-

I'll just drop a few lines to tell I am still alive, getting a little farther in the hole every day. I owe about six dollars for board and have on hand one dollar and ninety cents. I'll never quit Convassery till I pay for my board and it looks as if that might be a long time.

You know I broke my watch the other day. Well I showed it to a jeweler and he says it will cost four dollars to get it fixed. I broke one of the jewels and something else. There is a fellow that tinkers at watches out here in the country and I suppose if I thought it wise I might be able to give him a book for fixing it. I don't believe however

I will risk putting it into any one's hands here as I want only a first class job done.

There is not much news to tell except that I am going a little farther in the hole every day. I can't give up though because of this debt here for board.

Today Miss Smith of whom I spoke before invited me to dinner at her house. I went and Burr very unexpectedly come over on his wheel and was invited too. We both had a very pleasant time.

It was communion this morning and love feast before the service. I like Mr. Gray the minister very well. He goes right to the point and doesn't shout or use all kinds of flowery oratory.

That's about all the news I can think of so will close.

With love, Willie

W. H. Belden
Westfield Ohio

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Dear Mamma:-

All that is contained on this double sheet is just for you. You will also ^{find} a letter for the whole family and ~~the~~ monthly report of my finances. I have enclosed a letter for Grandmamma as I do not know her address. You may read the letter if you wish although you may not find it interesting as it repeats a good deal of news which you will already be familiar with when you have read the rest of my letters.

Your answer to my letter and a letter from Mary reached me in the same mail. In regard to what you said of my studies I would be very greatly obliged if you would find out as soon as practicable all the particulars from Miss Burroughs and also from Miss Ward as all work not made up before the beginning of the fall term can not be made up at all.

Now in regard to the rest of your letter - I have read it through very carefully at least three times and guess I have

thoroughly digested it. I want to ask you if you will let me send it to Helen, because it touches precisely on some points that we have been puzzling a great deal about. We don't seem to be able to decide what is right and best. I think you have changed your opinion of our friendship somewhat since two years ago, at least you must believe there is something in it, if it hasn't changed for nearly three years. It certainly isn't stubbornness that has kept me writing to her all this time, because I don't believe I've got that much stubbornness and besides that, it is now over a year since you have said anything against our corresponding. ~~for over a year.~~

Then taking it for granted that there is at least a very strong friendship between Helen and myself the question is - is it possible for such a friendship to exist and not to mean more than simply a friendship? If it is possible, I don't see what harm there is in it as long as we don't make it more than a simple friendship. On the other hand if it isn't possible, is it wrong for us situated as we are to look upon each other as more than friends? And if it is wrong what is to be done about it?

In answer to the first question I wish to hear what you say. In my own opinion I don't think it possible for Helen and me to just be good friends after what has passed between us. [I think Helen told you practically everything.] We have been writing to each other or at least trying to do so as simply very

good friends for the last year and a half, but I know it hasn't made one particle of difference in the feelings of either one of us and we haven't managed to deceive ourselves or each other a single bit. Helen is under no obligation to me nor I to her - that is to say we have retracted all promises we ever made, but so far as I can see it hasn't made one particle of difference. We have not only changed our letters entirely and taken back all promises but have also tried to look upon each other as simply ~~for~~ friends. I don't see as there is any thing else to try and so don't believe that by any act of ours we can become simply good friends which is the way we have tried to solve the problem.

If it isn't possible for us to simply be good friends is it wrong for us to be any thing more? That is the question that I wish you would answer and explain all the reasons. I don't believe it is wrong because we are especially unsuited to each other except by age and very likely not on account of that. Dr. Josiah Strong, Marjorie's father is five or six years younger than his wife and I think you know whether their matrimonial life has been a blessing or not.

I wish you would give your reasons for not believing in long engagements. If it is because they are likely to be broken off, it seems as if the difficulty rights itself in a manner. That is to say, I don't see as it is sufficient reason to break off an engagement

that promises to be long, simply because if not broken off immediately, it possibly may be broken off later. Of course a long engagement may mean a great sorrow, but ~~does~~ when it is broken off for that reason, it means that in order to ward off the possibility of trouble in the future, time for the present is made certain. So in my eyes it is a question of a possibility against a certainty. But I do not mean to take a narrow view and I am also looking at the other side, as I will soon show you but I wish you would also look on this side of it and please read very carefully what I have written and tell me where my reasoning is false and what facts I haven't taken into consideration.

Now I don't believe that it is because Helen wouldn't make a first class wife and daughter, that you feel as you do. I have heard you say yourself that you thought she and Emily were excellent housekeepers and you know when they were in Oberlin, Helen always did the larger part of the work taking care of the rooms. You know she has a good mind and I believe a fairly strong constitution. I know she is a true Christian although all her ideas are not all the same as mine and yours. Indeed I think about the only serious objection you have to her is that you think that she is sort of fickle like Carriell but I think you ought to be convinced by this time that that is not so. I know you think she is a lady and has perfect manners. Another quality which you ought to admire is her frankness. You would have known everything about us whenever it had happened if it hadn't been for me. I was always the one to keep

This is just for Mamma

everything secret and tried to keep her still but I guess as it was she told everything there was to tell. She always told me everything you told her too. Of course Helen has her faults but so does everybody.

Then further I don't think you object because you don't think I will make a good man and on that account ought never to marry. Of course I have my faults and am pretty immature but in all probability by the time I am through my ^{college} education and have some position I will at least be an average man and not one who should be prohibited from marrying.

I think I have summed up a large number of objections that might be raised but feel sure that I have not struck the right one yet. Your letter while being very full in some respects was still to my mind very ~~ambiguous~~ hard to understand. You say that I should concentrate every effort now on my

College education, that's just exactly what Helen and I have always said and I would be twice as anxious to get through college if I had some aim in view.

You said in my letter that I should go by judgement and not feeling. Well if I am to go by such a cold blooded thing as pure judgement I must make it a judgement that will be just and reasonable. And if I am to make it just and reasonable I must take into account every fact and weigh accurately each reason. Now while you have told me to use my judgement and even intimated what my judgement should be, I don't think you have given any of the reasons that I should consider or any of the facts. You have said that for a good many reasons you don't believe in long engagements but haven't given any of the reasons. Well how am I to judge without the reasons? I might accept your judgement but I think it has a bad effect on any one especially one just forming his character to let another person decide his problems and be his conscience for him. I believe that advice should always be given careful thought and candid consideration especially if coupled with good sound reasons, but

I also firmly believe that a person who cannot or will not decide a question for himself is a pitifully weak character. Now what I wish to ask you for is your advice and every reason for your opinion.

I think possibly you may have received a misconception of what I have formed my opinion upon from what I have said in this letter. I haven't meant to say that I am at all anxious to marry or even be engaged to Helen. I don't feel that way at all but what I do think is that if our friendship goes on the same way it will ~~undoubtedly~~ end that way. At least unless something should happen to change our friendship very much there isn't any fellow that would have a shadow of a show to win. Helen and I never would pay attention to any other girl. That would mean [unless things changed, of course] that we either would marry or be an old bachelor and old maid who liked each other very much. It seems to me the latter would be a highly improbable state of affairs.

Well now I would like to ask you what true love is - the love that should bring two persons together and make them one in spirit.

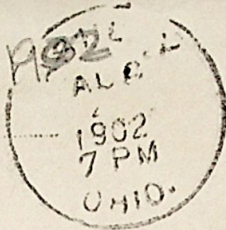
I more than half expect that you will answer to this that I don't know and that I couldn't understand. But that isn't fair, I must know if I am to use my judgement. If you can't tell me what it is you certainly can at least tell me what it is not. I have written a very cold matter of fact letter in order to show you that I look at the matter candidly and mean to have my judgement entirely unbiased. But I might have written an entirely different letter if I had tried to tell you how much I think of Helen or what it would mean to me at present if our friendship should be broken up. However if it is God's will I will try to do what I believe to be right. You know you say I never own up to a fault. Well I am willing to own that I think that Helen and I acted very foolishly in some things that we said and did in Oberlin. I think as you said feeling came in ahead of judgement. Experience is a teacher whose lessons we do not soon forget and I am determined that nothing shall occur if I visit Worcester to make me regret any visit.

There is still one question on which I would like the weight of your opinion and that is do you think it is for the best for Helen and myself to be so good friends that no one can come between us. It of course would be no detriment to me but I have been wondering if it is fair to Helen. She is now a graduate and is it fair for a boy of my age to make her wait until I shall be a man and can offer her myself? It is possible that she might find some one more suited to her years who would take the place that I occupy and a great deal more. I will tell you in the very strictest confidence that there is a fellow a student in Hartford Theological Seminary who is paying her a good deal of attention and ^{perhaps} may mean something serious although I know Helen has given him absolutely no encouragement. Well I suppose if it were not for me he might have some chance to win Helen in time and make her more happy than maybe I ever could. But of course he or any other fellow ~~can't~~ ^{doesn't} have any show even though we are not bound to each other at all. Sometimes I think it would be better for Helen if she only thought of me as a friend who would not ~~be~~ be changing his place in her thoughts if she should form a truer and nobler friendship with one could give her what I ~~can not~~ ^{cannot} give her. I want to do what is best for Helen whatever my sacrifice may be. ~~for a short time~~

Sincerely Willie

After.....days, return to

Aug 31



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Aud

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Ohio

Thomas H.

T. H. A.

