

## A HOBBY ENDED

Francis O'Keefe, '46

A property peculiar to every home is the family album. It is a priceless treasure, and serves to each succeeding generation as a memento of the past. Always it contains family pictures and other relics from as far back as circumstances allow. The album may vary all the way from a loose collection of snapshots to an elaborate affair of immense proportions.

From my early childhood I gradually developed a weakness for perusing albums. At every opportunity I was climbing up someone's family tree via the picture method. It was an intensely exciting game, and rich in revelations of human physiognomy. In this I was gaining for myself a host of friends from many generations. It was a pleasant diversion to sit by the hour with those silent ones and conjure up characters and life from the many faces. Never could I imagine anything but pleasure from such an innocent occupation. But as all good things come to an end, so ended my hobby in a strange manner.

That you may appreciate my fear of albums, I must relate, without delay, the agonizing experience that changed this questionable practice. Even though I suffer it again, you must know the truth. It happened on my second visit to Bertha's home. Bertha, her five sisters, and myself were seated in the parlor indulging in a game of something or other. I do not remember what game, as the main program of the evening made the first act a forgotten thing forever. By some mutual intuition, or acting on some concerted impulse or signal, the sisters departed in a body. For a moment I felt more at ease with the female majority eliminated. It was now a fifty-fifty basis for entertainment, so I thought; but I was sorely deluded in my reasoning.

Such a sudden reduction in numbers created an awkward moment of suspense, and to renew the evening required the saying or doing of the proper thing. Then something in me prompted me to explore the contents of the piano bench close by. Ah! There it was, an album. The temptation was too great, and in a moment I was oblivious to my surroundings. It was a fatal move. As I now recall it, I shudder. It was only seconds, however, till Bertha gathered herself for

hasty action. Her first move was to remove deftly a dozen or so snapshots, and place them safely away from my anxious eyes. This motion was accompanied by a sly wink that was intended to convey a particular meaning to me. Those were others suitors, who claimed no fixed position in the album, and who could always be taken out under similar conditions to mystify and create a feeling of insecurity. This is just another subtle artifice of the feminine mind, and an effective one.

The preliminaries were now over. The torturer, armed with this new type of weapon, closed in for the kill. She began where I would have ended. There is seldom any vivid resemblance between the people of four or five generations ago and those of the present, unless one works his way gradually from the present to the past. In this process one can discard all those who, happily or otherwise, had their faces posted for family history. Then the whole pattern of the tribe is easily apprehended. But we were to proceed by her method. Thus she won a major victory.

Now flushed with triumph, she began her lecture on the history of the first bewhiskered spectacle, who, to me, might have been Abraham, or even Elias. He turned out to be her great-great-grandfather. It appears that he became entangled in some of the political quarrels in Scotland, and by dint of good fortune (plus some scheming) found his way to America. The emaciated visage on tin was ample proof of the woeful and tedious tale. Across from him was a saintly looking old lady of at least ninety years. In her day she was noted for her charity and religious fervour. However, nothing was known of her early life in Paris, except the fact that her people were very wealthy. Despite the claim of mutual love between these distant forebears, I could visualize something antithetical in their very natures. At any rate, I was introduced to one link in the ancestry, and should have felt more at home than ever before. As pages two and three loomed into view, one glance showed them to be very successful in at least one phase of life. A group of fourteen (a little more human looking) testified to their attempt to people the earth.

My mind was now straining for an excuse, lawful or otherwise, to extract myself from this predicament. The old clock began to beat his drum, one, two, — — — eleven. Taking advantage of this, I jumped for freedom, but again

failed miserably. "Now just sit down again," said Bertha, "and in a jiffy you will have a lunch." The album was no longer a suggestion for diversion. While waiting for lunch, I only stared at the great black affair, and an unholy repugnance for it came over me. The lunch, or rather the meal, was forced on me in the same vigorous way that the album had been. In the end I arrived home too full of both. There was no sleep. The food kept me awake, and the ghosts from the album worked overtime to annoy me. Truly it was one of the worst nights in my whole life.

Now I shun albums. I hate them. Perhaps you have been fortunate enough to escape such an experience. If so, don't be too happy about it all. Your day will come. The law of averages is against your winning all the time. There is someone lying in wait for you right now with an album. I know it.



Earth has no sorrow that Heaven cannot heal.

—Moore.

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Into each life some rain must fall,  
Some days must be dark and dreary.

—Longfellow.

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There is a tide in the affairs of men,  
Which taken at the flood leads on to fortune.

—Shakespeare.

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Words are like leaves and where they most abound,  
Much fruit of sense beneath is rarely found.

—Pope.