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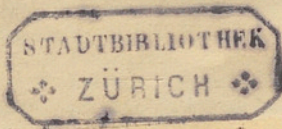
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OF

GEORGE W. CHILDS.

BY

FRANK H. NORTON,  
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1877.

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SKETCH  
OF  
GEORGE W. CHILDS.

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A COPY of the PUBLIC LEDGER lies before us, dated Philadelphia, March 25, 1836, and being the first number of that paper, now in its forty-first year. It is a little sheet of 15 by 13 inches in dimensions, but is important for several reasons.

In the first place, as being the type of the earliest issues of penny papers in America, and, in the second place, as having been the foundation of the fortune of the gentleman, some particulars concerning whose life we propose to offer in this place.

GEORGE W. CHILDS was born in Baltimore in 1829, and even in his earliest years gave token of the earnestness, perseverance, and industry which have served to build up and sustain both his character and his fortune. When only thirteen years of age

he entered the United States Navy, in which service he only remained fifteen months, gaining, however, it is probable, through this experience, that sense of order and that spirit of discipline which have marked both his own conduct and his direction of affairs ever since. When fifteen years old young Childs went from Baltimore to Philadelphia. He was successful in obtaining a situation in a publishing house, where he so proved himself to his employer as possessing not only the attributes we have mentioned, but sagacity and good judgment as well, that he was specially deputed, as a portion of his duty, to attend auction sales and purchase books for the house with which he was connected. After a time the face of young Childs grew to be familiar to booksellers throughout the country as representing this establishment at the annual trade sales in New York and Boston. At the end of four years the young man started in business for himself in a small room of the building then occupied by the PUBLIC LEDGER of Philadelphia. Here he was both industrious and successful, and growing by this time to be known and to make friends, he was presently offered a partnership in the house of R. E.

Peterson & Co., publishers, the firm becoming thereafter Childs & Peterson. In his new and responsible position, Mr. Childs did not fail to make the most excellent use of the good qualities which had thus far so materially aided in his advancement in life. Endowed with an intuitive taste and apparently instinctive judgment in the selection of works for publication, his choice in this direction fell upon some of the most salable and profitable books which have ever been published in the United States, and which went far to establish the fortunes of the firm of Childs & Peterson. Among such may be named—"Dr. Kane's Arctic Explorations," and a book by Parson Brownlow. The work called "Familiar Science" was, through Mr. Childs's energy and tact, pushed to a sale of 200,000 copies, gaining a footing in schools which it has held even up to the present time. For a dozen years or more Mr. Childs continued in the publishing business, the house issuing during this period such important works as "Bouvier's Law Dictionary," and "Institutes of American Law," "Fletcher's Brazil," and, most important of all, Dr. S. A. Allibone's "Dictionary of English and American Authors,"

which, with special courtesy and a due sense of appreciation, was dedicated by its distinguished author to Mr. Childs himself.

It would appear, from what we can learn from Mr. Childs's own assertions and those of his friends from boyhood upward, that his first and last material ambition was to own and control a daily newspaper in a leading city. The Philadelphia PUBLIC LEDGER, which had now existed for twenty-eight years, had by 1864 reached and passed the turning point of its existence. For many years a successful and still a valuable journal, circumstances had brought about a material change in its affairs, to that extent that at the time to which we allude it was in the market. Against the advice of his friends, Mr. Childs purchased the LEDGER. His first move in its conduct was a revolutionary one. Despite the change in prices and values which the progress of events, and the War of the Rebellion among them, had brought about, the proprietors of the LEDGER had held their paper at the same rates both for subscription and advertising under which it had been published for so many years. Latterly, they had been losing money with frightful rapidity, and it was

naturally considered a rash and dangerous step, when, on entering into the proprietorship of this journal, Mr. Childs at once doubled the price of his paper and advanced the rates of advertising to what he deemed just compensation for the advantages which he offered. The immediate result of this action was, of course, to drive away in some measure both subscribers and advertisers; but, as the course of the paper under its new management became indicated, these came back to it, bringing in their train others, until there opened an influx of monetary success, which has continued up to the present time without varying, and which promises to continue in the future.

The policy of the LEDGER, since Mr. Childs has owned and controlled it, has been of a character to be described in a very few words. In the first place, it has been undeviatingly high-toned in its character, scorning the low moral standard which so widely obtains among the press of the United States, with a straightforward integrity of purpose that is characteristic of its proprietor. Again, it has striven to treat such subjects, and such only, as were within the line which divides the real interest of the public

from that which is factitious. Finally, in its method of handling the questions of the day, it has followed the plan of treating each of these on its own merits, and without bias, or regard for personal opinion or criticism.

In its interior management, Mr. Childs has never failed to introduce into the LEDGER establishment all improvements and inventions which, in his judgment, were calculated either to facilitate the business of his paper, or to advance the comfort and interests of his employés. On June 20, 1867, the PUBLIC LEDGER took possession of a large building especially constructed for its purposes, standing at the southwest corner of Sixth and Chestnut Streets, Philadelphia. Erected and fitted under his own personal direction, this building became a model printing-house; probably in all respects the most perfect and complete establishment of the kind in the world. Here, where Mr. Childs had full direction and control in carrying out his own plans, he devoted himself to arrangements calculated to enable those in his employment to work in a manner the most agreeable and most healthful to themselves, as well as with a proper consideration for the prosecution of the duties which should

devolve upon them in advancing his own interests and those of the important journal in his charge. Mr. Childs's private office on the first floor of the building is, perhaps, the most beautifully designed and elegantly furnished business-room in the world.

Thus far, we have considered Mr. Childs in his accumulative capacity alone. It will become us now to look upon him in his character of a man of large wealth, with a view to seeing in what light he presents himself in his employment thereof. We are told in the proverb that "Sweet are the uses of adversity." This is a proposition which need not be gainsaid, yet with what added sweetness should become the uses of *prosperity* to those who have gained unto themselves its many possible advantages! In this country, where, according to one of its most distinguished political economists, "the rich are growing richer while the poor are growing poorer," we do not meet so frequently as would be desirable those of the one class who avail themselves of their advantages for the benefit of the other. And since it is in this light that the life of George W. Childs most becomes him, it is fitting that the good which possession of wealth has been made, through

his generosity, to yield to the poor and unfortunate, should be set forth in any account of his life. In the direction of the many hundred persons in his employment, it is a matter of public notoriety in the city where he lives that Mr. Childs has dispensed a generosity which is as boundless as it is appreciative. It is not every newspaper publisher who presents his employés with life-insurance policies, deals out festivals and amusement to them unsparingly on each recurring holiday, regards their health and welfare as he expects them to regard their duty during their lifetime, and, when they die, supplies them with a burial-place. Yet these things are precisely what Mr. Childs has been accustomed to do for those employed in the office of the Philadelphia LEDGER. These are, to be sure, benefits, a knowledge of which may readily be widespread, and, of course, not to the disadvantage of the one who confers them; but not alone by this method of benevolence has Mr. Childs distinguished himself. In the matter of personal charity, and under circumstances where publicity was the last thing that could be expected, if it were hoped for, Mr. Childs has a reputation among those who know him best which is without parallel.

As to the ordinary ways of appropriating money for charitable purposes, probably no man in the country receives nearly so many applications as he, and it is seldom that he rejects or refuses any that are really deserving. For devising original methods of gratifying those who are seldom gratified he is no less noted. By sending entire charitable institutions on pleasure excursions, by throwing open to those who are poor and unaccustomed to them, amusements, the memory of which proves perhaps the brightest reflection in their lives—by a thousand and one such devices, Mr. Childs has made his name honorably known, not only in the city where he lives and where naturally the most of his wealth is dispensed, but throughout the country, and even abroad.

But there are more ways of dispensing wealth to public advantage than by charity alone. By freely opening his elegant residences in hospitality to visitors from foreign lands, Mr. Childs has doubtless done much for the credit of his country in this particular, while he has brought about associations among distinguished personages which could scarcely fail to inure to the public benefit in some way. Probably no such gathering of distinguished and notable people was ever

collected together in the parlors of a private citizen in this country as met by invitation at Mr. Childs's Philadelphia residence on the evening of May 10th, 1876, the day of the opening of the Centennial Exhibition in Philadelphia. On this occasion there were present President Grant, with his wife; all the members of his Cabinet, with their wives; the Chief Justice and Associated Justices of the Supreme Court of the United States, and their wives; the Emperor and Empress of Brazil; the Diplomatic and other representatives of Great Britain, France, Spain, Austria, Prussia, Russia, Italy, Belgium, Turkey, Japan, China, and other powers of Europe and Asia; the governors of Maine, New Hampshire, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, Kentucky, Pennsylvania, New Jersey, Delaware, and Maryland, with their staff officers; leading members of the United States Senate and House of Representatives; Generals Sherman, Sheridan, Hancock, McDowell; Admirals Porter, Rowan, Scott, Lardner, Turner, Jenkins, Alden; Centennial Judges and Commissioners from foreign countries and the United States; famous military and naval officers, eminent judges, leading lawyers, prominent divines, presidents of colleges, authors,

journalists, artists ; in fact, men famous in every branch of professional and private life. And this instance, except in the remarkable comprehensiveness of its scope, as to the guests, merely illustrates the rule in Mr. Childs's social life. Scarcely a prominent visitor from abroad arrives in this country who is not furnished with letters of introduction to Mr. Childs, and entertained by him. Compare such generous courtesy to the representatives of foreign aristocracy, wealth, and intelligence, with the refinement of delicate appreciation which induced Mr. Childs, during the continuance of the Centennial, to furnish with the means to visit the great fair not only numbers of poor women who would otherwise not have seen it, but also as many as two thousand children who, through Mr. Childs's liberality, were sent happy-hearted to the wonderful Exhibition at Fairmount, and furnished with good dinners while there enjoying the show. Children of the Philadelphia Deaf and Dumb Asylum, the Church Home, and those of other public institutions of that city were thus favored, and in the case of the House of Refuge, it illustrates the peculiar quality of his thoughtfulness that he made a special request that its inmates should be permitted

to lay off the uniform, which is their badge, while visiting the Exposition, and wear new suits to be supplied and paid for by him. It is in his peculiar happy faculty for discrimination in the awarding of his benefits and in his methods of distribution, as much as in the lavishness with which he yields up to public and private uses such a large portion of his fortune, that Mr. Childs is specially distinguished. Not an unsuitable illustration of this characteristic, possibly, was his gift of a memorial window in Westminster Abbey in honor of the poets George Herbert and William Cowper. This munificent gift was merely occasioned by the receipt on the part of Mr. Childs of a circular from the committee of English gentlemen who had the matter in hand.

In considering this instance of the refinement of generosity, it should be remembered that it illustrates the patriotism of the man, no less than his liberal impulses. The placing of an elegant stained glass memorial window in Westminster Abbey—the shrine of all the memories that by the English-speaking population of the world are held dearest—was a truly graceful act, associating the American people with their English

brethren in a most generous and most fitting tribute to names the world delights to honor.

At the time of the appointment of its official representatives at the Centennial Exposition, the British Government honored Mr. Childs by designating him to the service referred to in the following highly complimentary acknowledgment on the part of the Duke of Richmond and Gordon, Lord President of the Council :—

[COPY.]

LONDON,

4th January, 1877.

SIR: I have heard with much pleasure from Colonel Sandford of the valuable and important assistance you have rendered me, as one of the Honorary Commissioners for Great Britain, her Colonies and Dependencies, at the Philadelphia International Exhibition of 1876.

It will gratify you to know that Her Majesty's Government have expressed their highest approval of the administration of the British section, towards the success of which in America you have been good enough so much to contribute.

I have the honor to be, sir, your obedient servant,  
(Signed) RICHMOND AND GORDON.

GEORGE W. CHILDS, Esq.,

Honorary Commissioner for the United Kingdom.

As to the sentiment with which Mr. Childs is regarded abroad, Colonel John W. Forney says of him : “ When I carried letters from him to Europe in 1867, his name was a talis-

man, and it was pleasant to see how a nobleman like the Duke of Buckingham honored the endorsement of an American who thirty years before was a poor boy." To be thus esteemed at home and abroad ; to be regarded as a benefactor by the poor, and valued as a friend by the rich ; to wield generously, and with vivid appreciation of the relations which obtain in this life, the influences of vast and increasing wealth ; to do all this while one lives is to rear certainly the most enduring and possibly the most satisfactory monument of fame which it is given to men to exhibit before posterity. It is said of Mr. Childs that while still young he set before himself as the intention and ambition of his future, "the accumulation of riches, not for himself alone, but to make others happy during and after his life." At the age of forty-seven Mr. Childs sees one-half of this scheme of his life completed, and the other half so far advanced toward accomplishment that it needs only to conclude it after its author's intention, the final seal and inscription which are set upon every man's doings, and which, it is to be hoped in the interests of humanity, may be long ere they come to GEORGE W. CHILDS.