Eugene Ware's Concern About a Woman, a Child, and God

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I. THE WOMAN: THE PROMISE OF A STAR

The year 1868 was a leap year, so the Monitor, January 22, as was more or less the custom, encouraged the girls by compiling a list of the town's most eligible "phat takes." The Wares, father and son, had established themselves in the harness business, apparently in late October or early November of 1867. If no other evidence were available the inclusion of Eugene in the January list of eligible bachelors was testimony that he had already made an impression about town:

E. F. Ware, though lately come among us, stands well in the community. However, he is one that soliloquizes—and has been overheard repeating the following:

Can it be virgin bashfulness
That has concealed the tender thought?
Or fear I might perchance confess
A love that was not sought?

He would be an easy conquest for some fair one who has what he is devoid of—assurance.

Whether or not this estimate of Ware was altogether accurate may be beside the point. He had made a positive impression, even though, in relations with the fair ones, he lacked assurance. Ware was always a man's man.

After nearly three years, another glimpse of Ware was a matter of record. This was in Ware's own local page of the Monitor, October 14, 1870, when as reporter he interviewed a visiting Spiritualist lecturer, a Mrs. C. Fannie Allyn. As Ware told the story, in the seance he made the acquaintance of a Mr. Vinton, formerly of New Hampshire, but then of the spirit world:

He likes a good Yankee joke just as well as we do. . . . [He] poked fun at us in such a rude, bland old way that he just buried himself in our heart. We like a joke even if it is on ourselves . . . and says he, "Mr. Local, you fall in love with every good looking girl you see. You're a very susceptible young man, you are; there's a little soft spot in your head on the woman question." We blushed and tried to think of something bright to say but wasn't equal to the emergency, and then the good kind fellow saw how embar-

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rassed we were and he smoothed it all over and gave us compliments that made it all up. ... But that was a little too cruel—that woman joke was. Ain't a "single" man obliged to have a soft spot in his head on the woman question?

During the campaign of 1872 Ware's comments on women were on the acid side. To draw conclusions from that fact, however, would be dangerous. He may have suffered a disappointment, or he may have been indulging in public in a cynicism frequently assumed to mask a quite different feeling toward the opposite sex. When a coroner's verdict on a suicide concluded that it had been caused by a woman, Ware commented: "Some woman is always found to be an accomplice in all such scrapes and we should think they ought to be banished from the community." 1

But this may have been only one of Ware's peculiar types of humor of exaggeration which sometimes missed the mark. Some weeks later he commented on marriage:

Single lonesomeness is being transformed into duplicated cussedness to a vast extent in the counties north and west of us. Every young man ought to have his pie-box packed so as to be able to get out of the country as soon as the epidemic threatens his native health.2

The scarcity of young women in Fort Scott apparently overcame such cynicism on the part of unattached young men who slipped out of town as inconspicuously as possible on unannounced business. Ware took notice of such suspicious behavior and published a warning:

Any single young man leaving Fort Scott and going east on a trip who does not file a declaratory statement with the clerk of the District Court, setting forth the nature of his business and the probable length of his absence will be advertised the day after his departure as having gone east to get married.3

Some who did not go east, married young school teachers on the spot and brought on a major crisis in Kansas:

The Representative to the Kansas Legislature from Smith county, has been nominated upon a district pledge that he will introduce a law making it a felony for a young man to marry ... a school marm in a county having less than 5,000 population. This is on the grounds of public policy that in the frontier counties it is impossible to educate the young on account of the marriage of the teachers.4

Bourbon county had a population in excess of 5,000, so such a law would not have applied in Fort Scott when the following article appeared in the Fort Scott Border Sentinel, October 12, 1874:

1. Fort Scott Daily Monitor, August 23, 1872.
2. Ibid., October 17, 1872.
3. Ibid., August 9, 1872.
4. Ibid., October 16, 1872.
THE PHILOSOPHER’S DOOR

On passing along Market street today, we called at the office of the philosopher of paint creek, but found the following on his door:

About three feet of fooscape paper and the same distance of rope, pencil and rubber attached. From the length, of the aforesaid papers, we should suppose the philosopher was on a visit to the Holy Land, or Hungary—Hungary, we believe is the proper solution. People do not travel with such celerity in those countries as they do in this country of ours. This the philosopher will explain on his return.

The following is a verbatim copy, as appears on the above mentioned paper:

E. F. Ware, present occupant, gone visiting will be back about November 1. Leave orders.

ORDER I

Come where my love lies dreaming.

ORDER II

A friend came here on business,
But found the sanctum closed,
With none to attend to clients,
Who came here well disposed.

We asked the present occupant,
When WARE had gone away;
The echo, sent the answer back,
We went east the other day.

Friend, may pleasure, your companion be,
While visiting the eastern shore,
But wish you in your sanctum,
To open the sanctum door.

Two weeks later, the same paper published the following:

LEGAL NOTICE

Before Rev. Dr. Buckland, at Rochester, N. Y., in the presence of a large number of witnesses, personally came Eugene F. Ware, who deposeth and says that he is of lawful age; that he is by occupation a lawyer; that he desires to have and to hold in his peaceful possession, the accomplished Jeanette P. Huntington. The evidence on the other side being extremely brief, the prayer of the petitioner was granted; and there being no lawful objection to custody of said Jeanette P. Huntington on this 22d day of October, is given to said petitioner.—In testimony thereof, the congratulations of the friends are numerous.

HyMEn & Co., Pl'fs Attys.

On October 25, the Daily Monitor recorded the arrival on the preceding day of E. F. Ware and bride.

The only printed evidence of this period that has been found concerning E. F. Ware’s active interest in the welfare of the Fort Scott schools, appeared in the spring of 1878. At that time he was nominated on the Citizens’ ticket for treasurer of the school
board against the regular Republican ticket, and was defeated. His defeat and his subsequent raid on the faculty of the city schools had no doubt only a casual, not a causal, relationship. Ware's courtship of Nettie Huntington was among those things that for him were strictly private, but to his eldest daughter Abby he wrote reminiscently in 1897: "I promised your mother once if she would marry me I'd get her a star sometime—I haven't been able to get her one yet, and now I'm getting so advanced in years that I can't even catch an airship." 5

II. A Woman, a Child, and God

Eugene Ware had a concern about God before he met Nettie Huntington. The exact time of their meeting and of their engagement are not now known, but the commitment occurred during the school year 1873-1874. From that time onward he incurred a new obligation to exercise restraint over his expressions about women and about preachers and churches. He had said harsh things on both subjects. Nettie was an orthodox Baptist. The poem "Kriterion" was published August 16, 1874, two months prior to the wedding. In this treatment of the soul and immortality he concluded:

Perhaps—this Immortality
May be indeed reality.

The origin of "The Washerwoman's Song" has been the object of legitimate speculation, and much absurd legend. Ware was peculiarly reticent about its origin, and seemed to permit, if he did not encourage the legend, however untenable it obviously was. Possibly, if not probably, he preferred to divert public curiosity away from things most peculiarly private. As already pointed out, "The Washerwoman’s Song" was published January 9, 1876. Even if the published stories were substantially true about it being written earlier, being received coldly by his literary friend, Postmaster T. F. Robley, and being laid away until given to a reporter desperate to fill a column on a dull day, there was more than that involved. The first child born to the Wares arrived January 4, or five days prior to the publication of the poem. Thus Abby [Abigail] Ware and "The Washerwoman's Song" were necessarily closely associated. Although the evidence is circumstantial, the washerwoman of the poem appears to have been only a subterfuge to mislead the public and divert attention from the real

woman of the poem and attention from the dilemma of Eugene and Nettie. The poem was written during the weeks of tension associated with the first childbirth of their married life:

Sometimes happening along,
I had heard the semi-song,
And I often used to smile,
More in sympathy than guile;
But I never said a word
In regard to what I heard,
As she sang about her friend
Who would keep her to the end.

* * *

It's a song I do not sing,
For I scarce believe a thing
Of the stories that are told
Of the miracles of old;

* * *

Human hopes and human creeds
Have their roots in human needs;
And I should not wish to strip
From that washerwoman's lip
Any song that she can sing
Any hope that songs can bring;
For the woman has a friend
Who will keep her to the end,

Christmas was just passed, and vividly would the story of Joseph and Mary and the Christ child assume a new and personal meaning. Certainly to Nettie! Then on January 4, 1876, a new soul was born into the world. No longer was the Ware household just Nettie and Eugene. The mother of the child, in prospect now a reality, called for the utmost in sympathetic understanding of her faith. This was no time for cynicism. Even though he could not himself believe on the Christian Miracle, he had been living for months in the intimate presence of a contemporary miracle.