



"We live together, years and years,
And leave unsounded still
Each other's springs of hopes and fears,
Each other's depth of will."

Johnny's Stamp Act.

BY KENDALL PERRY.

The old, soiled stamp book had been "kicking around the house" for years, from one resting place to another, until at last it had found ownership and a safe place among Johnny's treasures.

The strange bits of colored paper had a fascination for Johnny. They were pasted in straight lines up and down the pages. The name of the country, the stamps of which had the page to themselves, was written in round, boyish writing, not by Johnny Kirtland, but by his uncle, Jim Caspar.

"Is the stamp book Uncle Jim's or mine?" That question would not "down" in Johnny's troubled soul.

At every annual housecleaning, when secretaries, bookcases and bureau drawers were ransacked in the Kirtland household, the cry had been:

"This old book is no good! What's the use of saving it? Toss it into the waste-paper box."

Johnny had regularly interfered and saved it, until his sister Mabel said:

"Well, take it out of sight, and keep it if you want it."

So, among arrow heads, broken flutes, fishing lines, boxes of discarded paints, bags of marbles, watches that would not go, and a host of things too numerous to mention, Uncle Jim's old stamp book had honorable place for two years, until at last the stamp-collecting craze reached Kimpton again. Then Johnny brought the book to light and studied it eagerly and often.

The more he studied it, the surer he became of its value, and the more distinctly did the crowned heads and helmeted faces seem to be requiring Johnny's answer to the question: "Do we belong to you or your Uncle Jim?"

"I'll give you my nickel-case watch for that stamp on the page marked Greece," said Alec Norton, as the boys looked the book over. Alec pointed to a buff and brown stamp whereon a winged helmeted head was surmounted by a Greek inscription. "You can cut it out. I'll soak it off. The old stamp book is no good. Look at mine!"

Alec displayed a beautiful leather-bound, gilt-edged book, where rows of neatly-kept stamps added beauty to the tinged pages.

"I hardly like to cut it out if it is old," said Johnny, slowly. "And that's not all. No, I guess we'll not trade to-day."

"Well, remember, the nickel-case watch for the stamp of Greece, and 'most anything I have," Alec added, eagerly, "for the Papal States stamp, the one with crossed keys, Johnny. You could sell the watch, and it would help out the bicycle fund."

Johnny groaned in spirit as he descended from the attic, and walked absently out to the gate with Alec.

"Well, I'll think about it, Alec," said he, as they parted.

The result of the thinking was that he went to his mother with the troublesome question.

"Is that old stamp album mine or is it Uncle Jim's? Because, if it is mine, I can do as I like with it, and if it isn't, I suppose I can't touch it."

"Well, really, Johnny, that is a question that could be settled by asking Uncle Jim right out about it. Let me see, it was left here ten years ago, among his cast-off treasures, when the ranch fever struck him."

"Yes, and the stuffed birds and his boys' annuals, skates, guns and fishing rods, and the striped trousers," broke in Mabel. They're all gone except the old stamp book, and Johnny saved that."

"Well," said the mother, "Uncle Jim has never written and asked about them. Johnny fell heir to the other things, but he wishes to take possession of the stamp book with greater formality. Is that how the matter stands?"

"That's about it, ma," said Johnny, "but do you think he'd care? Where is Uncle Jim now? He never writes."

"He's somewhere in the West. I have his last address, but have heard nothing from him for five years. Uncle Jim is a strange fellow. What is the new craze, Johnny? Stamps, eh?"

"It's Alec Norton's craze. He's been reading in the papers about stamp auction sales. He's quite sure

I've got some valuable ones, and he'll trade or buy of any one. If I could sell him some of those stamps I could get a bicycle sooner."

Johnny Kirtland wanted a bicycle so badly that the family called his desire "Johnny's bicycle fever." It raged so fiercely at times that he could not sleep nine or ten hours, as a growing boy should, without waking up once or twice. Every morning found him as full as ever of plans for procuring a "wheel."

As money was scarce in the household, Johnny could not hope for help from the family exchequer, and his fertile brain was weary of vainly planning ways and means.

"Say, Johnny," said Alec, soon after his first vain attempt at purchase, "you don't suppose your Uncle Jim's old stamp book has one of the Scinde District stamps or a Mauritius one-penny for 1847, do you? If it has your fortune is made," and Alec unrolled a newspaper cutting, with startling statement that one Mauritius penny stamp was valued at one thousand dollars.

"One thousand dollars!" cried Johnny, staring.

"Yes, and in my Philatelic Journal a Scinde District stamp—half anna—is all the rage now. Have you any East Indies at all?"

"Yes," said Johnny. "There are both East Indies and Mauritius stamps. East Indies, four annas, two and one annas, and two Mauritius—"

"Let me see them, will you?" and the boys again ascended the attic to Johnny's den.

"Ma," said Mabel, as she heard the two upstairs, "Johnny wants that book awfully, and if possession is nine points of the law, I do think the book is really his. He has saved it from destruction a dozen times to my knowledge. I'd give it to him in a minute if it was mine. What shall you advise him to do?"

"I shall not advise him to do anything," said Mrs. Kirtland, quietly. "I am watching Johnny as I never did before. It's going to be pretty hard, but Johnny Kirtland's got the grip, Mabel, and—"

"What?" said Mabel. "The grip?"

"The honor grip. Have you forgotten?"

"But where yer feel yer honor grip, Let that aye be your border."

"Johnny's come to the border and has the grip, God bless him!" and Mrs. Kirtland bustled out into the kitchen to make some of Johnny's favorite tea cakes, she hardly knew why.

"You'll stay for tea, Alec, won't you?" she said, as the two boys descended. "Here are some of Johnny's favorite cakes. He'll eat more if he has company."

And Mrs. Kirtland beamed in true motherly fashion on the two boys, for Alec Norton was motherless, and although he was rich Squire Norton's son, Mrs. Kirtland often caught herself asking "that poor Alec Norton" to supper. No one took a heartier interest in his boyish fads than Johnny's mother.

"Alec's as smart as a whip, but easily influenced for good or bad, and he needs mothering," Mrs. Kirtland said to Mabel.

Both boys ate heartily, and Alec talked stamps that evening to his heart's content. At nine o'clock he started for home, and Johnny went to sleep and dreamed awful dreams. No wonder that daylight found Johnny more willing to rise than he remembered ever having been before, except on the Fourth of July. At breakfast, he astonished Mabel by cheerfully asking his mother for Uncle Jim's address.

"I can ask him and tell him just why I want it," he said, briskly. "I'll tell Alec to-day, and write to-night," he added.

So this letter was written:

Dear Uncle Jim.—Do you want your old stamp book, because, if you don't, I do, very badly. Of all the things you left here years ago when I was a kid, all are gone but this book. My mother cut up the striped trousers for me years ago, and the moths and worms finished the birds. But I've saved the stamp book. I want a bicycle, and there is a boy that reads the papers and knows lots that say I could sell some of the stamps. But I don't want to tell you say I may. We are all well. Write soon to yours truly,
John J. Kirtland.

P. S.—I think the stamps are really valuable—at least, some of them.

Mrs. Kirtland nodded approvingly as Johnny pushed the letter across the table for her inspection.

"Better write on the envelope, 'If not called for in ten days, return to John J. Kirtland, Kimpton,'" said she.

"All right, ma," said Johnny, and he mailed the letter with a lighter heart than he had carried in many a day.

A week later a very strange missive came to Kimpton post office. It was a square-folded sheet of brown paper tied with a bit of string, and addressed to John J. Kirtland. Johnny cut the string eagerly, unfolded the paper, and read, with eyes that seemed not to see, but to transfer in hot lines to his brain:

Dear Nephew,—I write in haste. Glad to hear from you. Send the book at once by registered package. I have walked twelve miles, and borrowed the stamp to mail this letter. Send the book at once. Will write again.
Your affectionate,
Uncle Jim.

Johnny laid the letter down and crept quietly up to his den in the attic. Mabel watched him turn slowly away, then she snatched up the letter and read it aloud.

"Well, mother," she said, indignantly, "I wouldn't have thought it of Uncle Jim! He's just as mean as he can be! I don't see what he could want with that old book. I am just going right up to comfort Johnny."

"No, Mabel," said her mother, "let Johnny be. I'll go—after a while." And go she did, to find Johnny crouched on the attic floor, with both arms on the old, flat trunk, and a blank, miserable face resting bowed upon them.

"Johnny," she said, quietly, as she seated herself on the old trunk and drew the boy's head and shoulders into her lap, "there is something you have gained this week—a greater, grander, better thing than all the bicycles in the world; yes, of more value than a whole bookful of Mauritius stamps at a thousand dollars apiece. Does my boy know what it is?"

"No," he whispered, with such a hopeless tone that Mrs. Kirtland felt all his pent-up disappointment.

"Bring me our Bible, dear, and let me show you." She turned to a marked passage, and Johnny read slowly as she pointed:

"Him that overcometh will I make a pillar in the house of my God; and he shall go no more out," and pointing still further, "'And I will write upon him my new name.'"

"Johnny, did you think you were overcoming this week, overcoming a desire to keep what you did not feel belonged rightfully to you? You could have sold the book, but you never would have been quite satisfied. Now, it will go to-morrow and leave an honest-hearted boy behind. Johnny, dear, when pillars are used for king's palaces or God's workmanship, they are hewn and polished until God and man can see their beauty and service. The hewing process is necessary. And then there is this best of all—the new name. I am so glad to know my boy has earned that."

Johnny Kirtland whistled as he returned from mailing the book—whistled so cheerfully that Alec Norton asked at once as he joined him on the street:

"Heard from your Uncle Jim?"

"Yes," said Johnny, "he wants his book, and I started it to-day. No trade in stamps now."

"Well, weren't you silly to tell him! And the bicycle fund—the bottom's knocked out of that again, I suppose. You told him they were valuable, eh? Why didn't you run them down or call them trash?"

"Because I—I couldn't," said Johnny, soberly.

A few weeks later Johnny showed Alec a letter that his Uncle Jim had written from Five Forks Ranch, Nebraska:

My Dear Nephew,—God bless you, Johnny Kirtland, for what you have done for us—my wife Annie, baby Carroll and myself. We were at our worst extremity, half starved out here on the ranch, doing without almost common necessities, living on a little corn-meal mush and just what few rabbits I could trap—no money to get away with, and on the point of throwing up one of the best claims ever trod on, because I couldn't find money enough to prove up on and settle.

When your letter came, I remembered instantly what that stamp book contained, and started off on foot to my nearest post office. On the strength of my book I borrowed from the banker there, who is a stamp collector, enough to stave off my worst creditors until I got my hands on those stamps again.

Johnny, you were right when you thought they were valuable. The sale of the book has given me back life, land, hope, happiness. Five Forks Ranch is mine forever now. As soon as I get fairly settled, I shall pay you a flying visit. Now, Johnny, which shall it be, a pair of Texas ponies or a bicycle, or both? Annie says both, and adds: "For, Jim, you had clear forgotten all about the book until Johnny wrote you of it, and kept it for you." So give my love to your mother and Mabel, and kindly remember me to that "boy who knows lots and reads the papers." As for you, I can only close as I began—God bless you from the crown of your honest head to the soles of your feet.
Your grateful
Uncle Jim.

Alec Norton gasped. "Well, I declare! Say, Johnny, if I were you and couldn't have both, I would choose the ponies."—Exchange.

Humorous.

Little Mary's big sister was engaged to Mr. Brown, who was away on an outing trip with Mary's brother. Her father was writing to his son and prospective son-in-law, and asked the little girl if she had a message to send to Mr. Brown.

"What shall I say, papa?" asked she.

"Why," said the father, "I believe it is the fashion to send your love."

Some minutes after her father enquired, "And what shall I say to brother Tom?"

"Well," replied the little miss, with a sigh, "you may send my fashionable love to Mr. Brown and my real love to brother Tom."

A magistrate visiting a British jail saw a prisoner who had a rat in his possession. The magistrate said: "Ah, you have a pet, I see." "Yes," said the convict, "I feeds him every day. I thinks more of that 'ere rat than any other living creature." "That proves," said the magistrate, "that in every man there is some good impulse, if you can only find it. How came you to take such a fancy to the rat?" "Cos he bit the warden," said the convict, cheerfully.