



New  
Tower

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Dear Papa --

Moments. . ., and the callendar, came as pleasing surprises; both arrived safely within the last fortnight or so and the kids have been shyly, but proudly, showing them off to their friends.

It's a delightful book, Pa, and should appeal to ~~xxxx~~ detail-loving, peace-seeking people of whom, it happily appears, there seem to be more nowadays. Not more, perhaps, but at least more who are unembarrassed to admit it. Moments of discovery is precisely the right phrase, isn't: The book is full of small discoveries for me, such as the name E. A. McIlhenny, which appeared in the caption of the picture of the Louisiana Heron and which rang a distant bell in the failing recesses of my memory. A day or two later, I noticed the name again, this time on a bottle of Tabasco sauce which is where I must have seen it before. I imagine old McIlhenny as a man with his priorities well in hand, rising before daybreak to pole about in the bayous in his bateau with his notebook and glasses, returning after the sun was well up to devote a carefully regulated hour or two to conferring with his foreman about the condition of the pepper crop. He was, I chose to believe, a man with perhaps only two preoccupations, which is enough for anybody.

I've been enjoying myself for the past week or so writing about the impending abolition of the conventional system of weights and measures in favor of the metric system. Had more fun finding about it all that wr ting about it, actually, since writing for a newspaper requires a kind of folksy yet impersonal ~~ix~~ artificiality that I find increasingly odious.

I discovered the proponents of conversion are, ~~xxx~~ many of them, as irrational and fanatic (though, of course far better organized) as the opponents whose membership includes some of the same people who say daylight saving will disturb the cows and hens. The project compelled me to contemplate the concept of quantification as a component of human communication, which is more than the proponents appear to have done. I could find no one, for instance, who could explain why it is necessary, or even desirable, to have a standard as precise as the wavelength of the emissions from an excited atom of krypton 89 ~~xx~~ for the measurement of, say, woolen cloth or firewood. The proponents, the intellectual descendants, I fear, of the same naive rationalism that brought the world the Terreur of 1793 and the conquests of Napoleon, never seem to have realized that there are some units of quantity which, though extremely inexact by laboratory standards of evidence, and though unrelated to any other units in general use, serve usefully in conveyance of ideas. A city block is one such; it serves well in the giving of directions to strangers in town. So is the sea, as in the expression three seas to windward. Even a term like smidgen can be useful in certain contexts. And since they are useful, why proscribe them?

The kids are well and, so far as I can tell, happy. E. F. is in Boston attending B. U.; Jack is taking a year off from the Chicago Art Institute to get some of his academic requirements out of the way and is home, attending classes at Washington University, the local streetcar college; Boxie, who wasn't able to get into Exeter for an additional year of school before tackling college, is working as a deckhand on a towboat and is planning to go to college next year. He writes us entertaining letters about life on the Miss. (and Ohio, Ill., Atchafalaya, Cumberland and Kanawha).

two --

Anne and Alex are still in school here.

Except for Jack, who is determined to make the most of his talents, none of the kids seems to have developed <sup>as</sup> much dedication to learning as I would have liked. Which is not to say that I have the slightest idea what I should have done differently, because I don't. Bringing up children is a difficult, mysterious and often disappointing business and about the most that can be learned from it is that it makes one tolerant of other parents. My chief satisfaction is that they have all turned out to be gentle people and never deliberately selfish or unkind, for which, I suppose, Jane can take more credit than I.

I wasn't able to get to Maine at all this summer, though Jane was in Bucks Harbor for a month with most of the tribe. It's hard to lure Jane to the Island these days: Her father isn't well and her brother died last Spring so she feels she must spend as much time as she can with her parents. And, of course, she feels more at home at Bucks Harbor, and so do the children.

Give my love to Aline and Pat -- and to J&Z when you see them. Please let us know if you're in the neighborhood.

Love,

B





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