Letters from Horatio – Part 2;
or, Alger finds sweetness out West

Louis Saroni & Company, located in San Francisco and later, Oakland, California.

Alger and Algebra
or, the trials and triumphs of a complex fraction

President's column

Good afternoon from Houston,

Although the COVID-19 issues persist, at least there appears to be a bit of light at the end of the tunnel. Vaccines are now available for us old folk and soon we will all have a modicum of protection. Even though the protection will not be absolute, I suspect that getting a vaccine will at least make us feel better. By the time you get this **Newsboy**, I will have received my second shot.

On a personal note, we are still mostly hunkered down. Occasionally we go out for some odds and ends. The troublesome winter weather that has burdened you northerners has finally gotten to us. Based on forecasts, we may have set an all-time record low temperature during the Valentine's Day week, including a dusting of snow. I called the landscaper to ask whether I should cover any plants. He suggested that the "Jatrophas" might benefit. Of course, I have no idea what jatrophas look like. He told me they are the ones with the round leaves. Not overly helpful but I guess I can rule out the bushes with square leaves.

While working on my bibliography last week, I came across a Chicagoland publisher that printed two series for juveniles. I thought his history was very apropos for those who enjoy the rags-to-riches stories of Alger. Of course, John R. Walsh's tale is even better, since his is a rags-to-riches-to-rags story.

John R. Walsh (1837-1911) was a native or Ireland, emigrating to the United States at the age of 12. He was orphaned and sold newspapers on the street to support himself. At 18 he became a clerk and salesman with the newsdealer J. McNally. McNally opened the first Chicago-area bookstore in 1848. In 1861, Walsh bought Giles F. Cline's periodical store. The latter store eventually became the Western News Company.

Walsh's store at the corner of Madison Street and Custom House Place carried a large inventory of periodicals, journals, blank books, etc. Walsh also published a

John R. Walsh.
Born Aug. 27, 1837.　　　Died Oct. 23, 1911.

HORATIO ALGER SOCIETY

Letters from Horatio – Part 2;
or, Alger finds sweetness out West

By Robert E. Kasper (PF-327)

Horatio Alger, Jr. undertook three trips to the West Coast in 1877, 1878 and 1890, ostensibly to collect new material for future books but also partly to seek relief from his chronic bronchitis, especially on his final trip. This article will focus on the first excursion that commenced in February, 1877, and lasted five months. Alger made San Francisco his head-quarters on this trip but visited many California locales and other towns and cities on this journey. One young man, Louis Saroni, a confectioner in San Francisco, made a particular impression on Alger. In many ways, Saroni's life and career could be described as a real Horatio Alger story.

* * *

By the mid 1870s, Horatio Alger's book sales were slipping as he had mostly exhausted the tales of city life of newsboys, bootblacks, factory workers and homeless street merchants. His 1874 issue of *Julius; or, The Street Boy Out West,* was generally well received and likely motivated Alger to look westward for new stories and plots. Many of his contemporaries were incorporating western themes into their novels, probably for the same reason.

Oliver Optic wrote *Going West; or, The perils of a Poor Boy* in 1875 and followed up with a sequel, *Out West; or, Roughing It on the Great Lakes,* two years later. Harry Castlemon (Charles Austin Fosdick) wrote the three-volume **Rocky Mountain Series** and the **Pony Express Series**, also in three volumes. Edward S. Ellis wrote numerous books about the Wild West under his name and various pseudonyms.

On February 1, 1877, Alger departed New York City via rail with a final destination of San Francisco.[1] Although this trip would normally have taken less than a week, Alger took a desultory 16 days stopping in Philadelphia, Pittsburgh, Chicago, Omaha, Salt Lake City and other places along the way.[2]

One notable stop was Omaha, Nebraska, where Alger visited and stayed with U. S. Senator Phineas W. Hitchcock (1831-1881). Alger later dedicated *The Young Adventurer; or, Tom's Trip Across the Plains* (A. K. Loring, 1878) to two of Hitchcock's children, Gilbert and Grace.[3] Educated as a lawyer, Gilbert later became a U.S. Representative and Senator and founded the
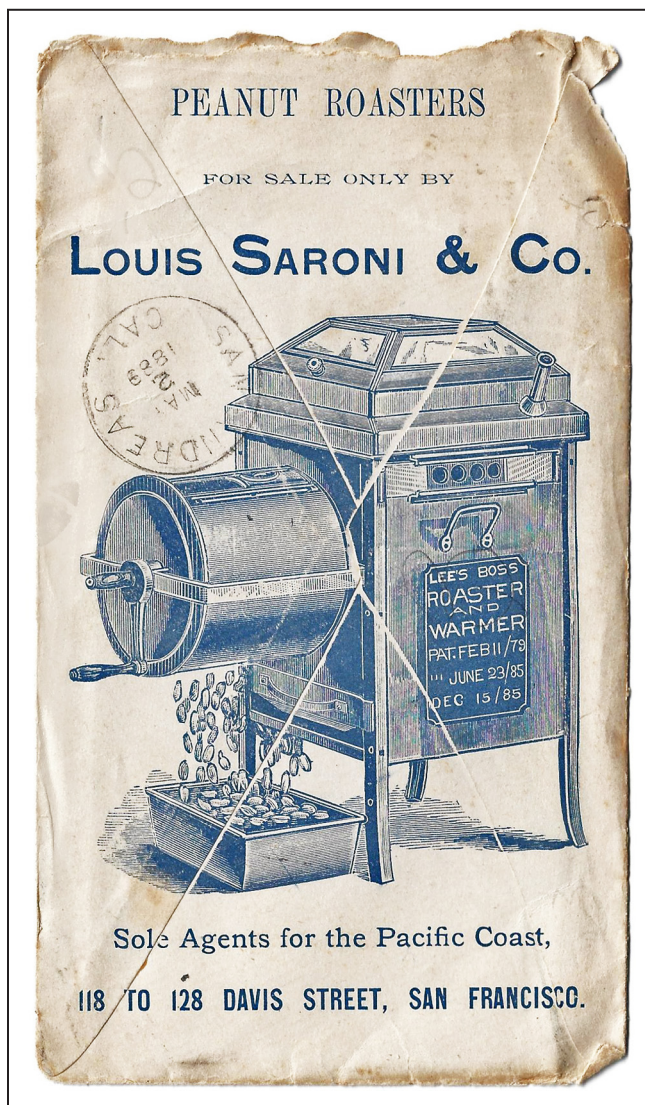
Illustrated advertising envelope for one of Louis Saroni & Company's many products.

Omaha World-Herald Newspaper.

After arriving in San Francisco on February 17, Alger immediately checked into the Palace Hotel, described by him as a first-class establishment erected only two years before. After a few local side trips, Alger later checked into the Grand Hotel across the street from The

Editor's notebook

One of the upsides of being homebound during the nearly one-year-long global pandemic is to "work my collection" — a term I came up with years ago. It beats just sitting around the house with nothing to do but reading the newspaper or watching television.

This mandated free time gives us not only a chance to re-read some of the books we enjoyed while growing up, but it also gives us time to do simple things like cleaning book covers, repairing dust jackets, culling out duplicate copies that found their way onto our shelves and, of course, replacing road trips with online book-hunting (which we've already turned to in the Internet era).

My limited book purchases are mostly confined to acquiring upgrades or filling missing spaces in my collection. In recent weeks I have made a key d/j addition to my Tom Swift collection and added a very rare jacketed title for another Stratemeyer Syndicate series.

I'm not the only one spending a lot of our "down time" with our collections, as H.A.S. President Cary Sternick continues the ongoing gargantuan task of adding to his on-line 19th century bibliography. In his latest column, he describes the discovery of Chicagoan John R. Walsh, a publisher with a fascinating Bernie Madoff-like history.

The main articles in this issue are the latest in Rob Kasper's series on the background of some of Horatio Alger's extant correspondence; and Keith Thompson offering a fascinating look at Alger's use of mathematics as plot points throughout his boys' novels. *Enjoy!*

NOTE: This issue encloses our official 2021 H.A.S. convention registration form, plus a slightly updated copy of the schedule of events, the latter also sent with the previous issue. Host Jack Bales also offers the latest in his series of illustrated convention preview articles.

MEMBERSHIP

Change of address

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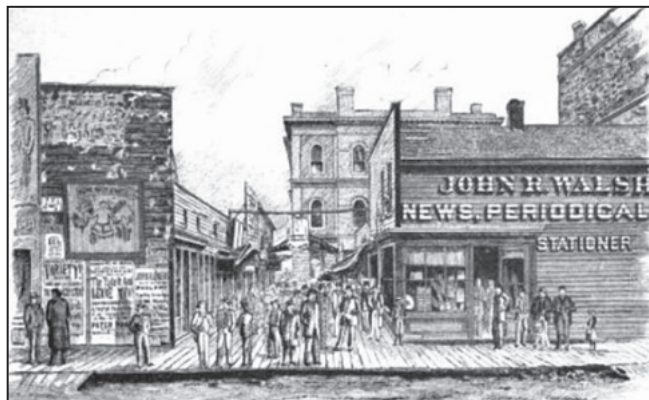
President's column

few miscellaneous works, including tax journals. In 1865 the firm name changed to John R. Walsh & Co.

The publishing/printing firm was a springboard for Walsh as he widened his business interests — banker, railroad coal mine owner and newspaper owner.

As the years went on, Walsh became a very wealthy man with a net worth estimated at 40 million dollars — $1.2 billion in 2021 dollars! Unfortunately, on Dec. 19, 1905, three of Walsh's banks were unable to open because of his poor and very speculative investments Apparently, Walsh had "borrowed" bank customers' money to fund his investments. Unfortunately, Walsh's business efforts did poorly. This eventually led to his financial ruin. In 1906, he was arrested for the violation of a number of federal banking regulations.

Walsh was found guilty of some of the charges and sentenced to five years in prison. He was released on parole after he had been jailed for less than half of that term. He died just a week after his release.

It was just 10 years prior to his fall from grace that this little blurb appeared in the newspaper:

"Best of all, it is to be recorded that John R. Walsh wrecked no railroads, defrauded no creditors and crushed no rivals by unscrupulous methods. … His success is a thoroughly clean and honorable one. An example like this is indeed one to be held up before the youthful American."

 I guess an "oops" is appropriate here.

That's it from the chilly Lone Star State. Be happy and stay safe.

Your Partic'lar Friend,
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2021 convention update

A cradle of presidential history

By Jack Bales (PF-258)

In the last issue of **Newsboy**, I mentioned James Monroe and his ties to Fredericksburg, Virginia (site of the June 3-6, 2021, Horatio Alger Society convention). Virginia itself has been called the birthplace of American presidents, as eight of its native sons have held America's highest office, including four of the first five presidents: George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, James Madison and James Monroe.

When you think of George Washington's home, what probably first comes to mind is his and Martha Washington's Mount Vernon estate. Washington, however, also had ties to the area around Fredericksburg, as I mentioned in the July-August 2020 **Newsboy**.

George Washington was born in 1732 on his father's tobacco farm near Oak Grove, Virginia, some 40 miles east of Fredericksburg. The house is long gone, but the foundation of the original building is outlined, and in the early 1930s a park was created and a house was built in 18th-century style. The National Park Service now operates the George Washington Birthplace National Monument, which includes a working colonial farm. A one-tenth scale replica of the Washington Monument marks the entrance to the grounds.

George Washington was six years old when his family moved to a farm in Stafford County, Virginia, across the Rappahannock River from Fredericksburg. The Washington family called it the Home Farm, but it is now referred to as Ferry Farm, because people crossed the river back and forth on a ferry. Located on Route 3, Ferry Farm includes a replica of the Washington house and a museum with artifacts found on the property. Visitors can walk the various hiking trails, go bird watching in the meadow, and stroll the gardens that include plants grown in Washington's time.

George Washington once said, "All I am, I owe to my mother." As previously mentioned in **Newsboy**, Mary Ball Washington resided in downtown Fredericksburg. When I moved here in the summer of 1980, I lived just a couple of blocks from both Meditation Rock, where she prayed for her son and country during the Revolutionary War, and her grave, which President Grover Cleveland dedicated in 1894. Nearby is Kenmore, a house built for George Washington's sister and brother-in-law.

Fielding and Betty Washington Lewis, George Washington's brother-in-law and younger sister, lived at Kenmore, a 1,300-acre plantation in Fredericksburg. Kenmore's main house, open for tours, is the plantation's only remaining building.

Kenmore is a well-known tourist stop in town, and guests used to be served gingerbread made from Mary Ball Washington's own recipe (a recipe that is readily available online; just Google "Kenmore" and "gingerbread" or the phrase "George Washington's mother's gingerbread recipe").

About 35 miles from Fredericksburg is the town of Orange, and four miles from Orange is the 2,700-acre estate of Montpelier, the plantation house of President James Madison and his wife, Dolley. A huge restoration completed in 2008 restored Montpelier to its original grandeur when the Madisons lived there. Besides the house, the grounds include a visitor center, archaeological sites (including one on African-American life at Montpelier), a formal garden, hiking trails, horse pastures, family and slave cemeteries, and magnificent views of the Blue Ridge Mountains. A slavery exhibition, "The Mere Distinction of Colour," opened in 2017. The National Trust for Historic Preservation has owned and operated Montpelier since 1984.

Horatio Alger Society members had the opportunity to tour Thomas Jefferson's home, Monticello, at Jeff Loo-
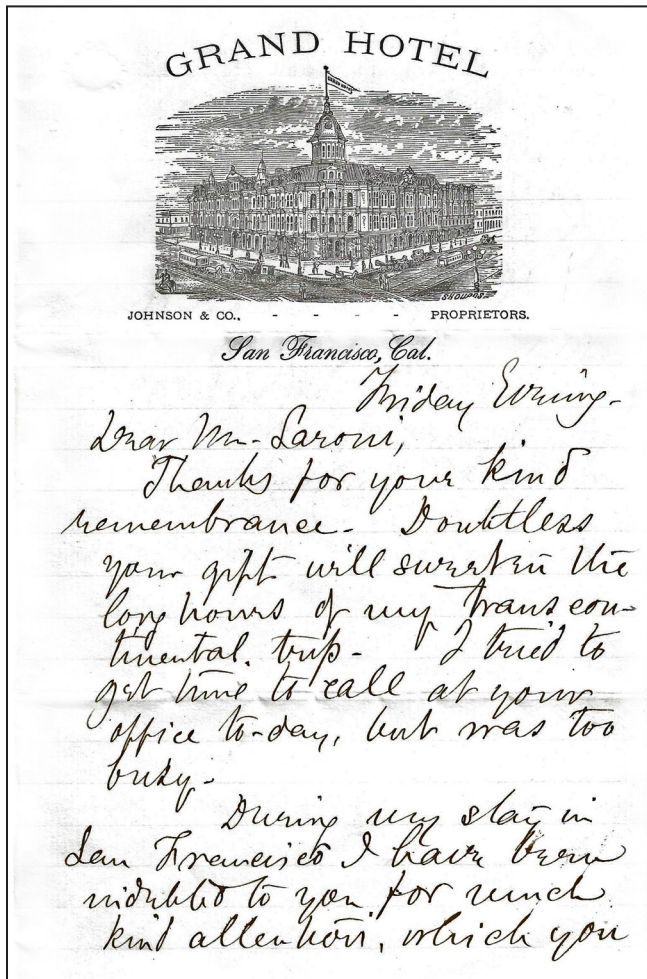
Friday evening [June 1877]
Dear Mr. Saroni,

Thanks for your kind remembrance. Doubtless your gift will sweeten the long hours of my transcontinental trip. I tried to get time to call at your office to-day, but was too busy.

During my stay in San Francisco I have been indebted to you for much kind attention, which you …
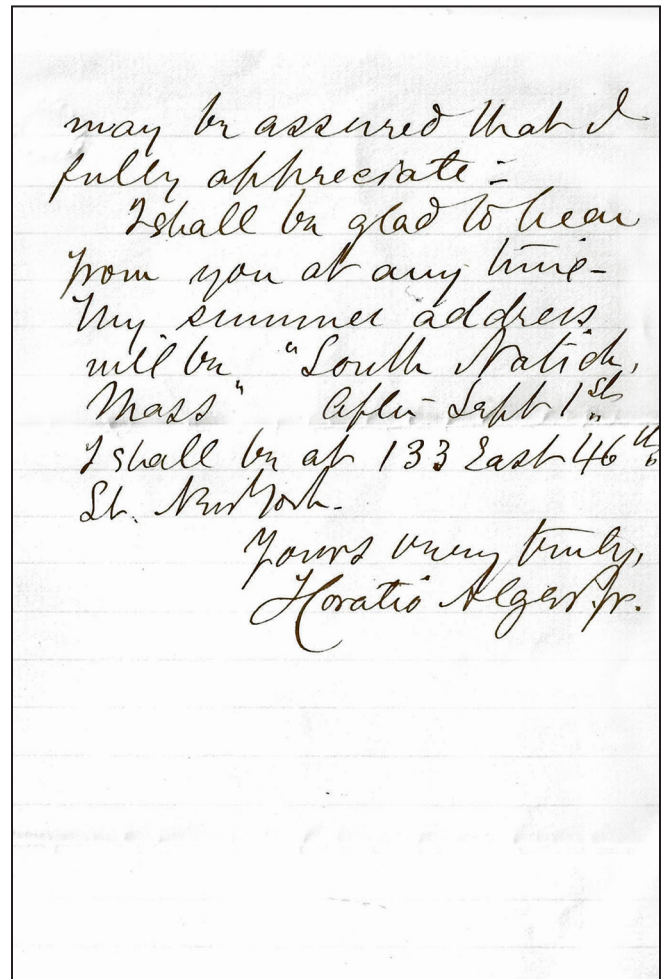
… may be assured that I fully appreciate.

I shall be glad to hear from you at any time. My summer address will be "South Natick, Mass." After Sept. 1st, I shall be at 133 East 46th St., New York.

Yours very truly,
Horatio Alger, Jr.

Letters from Horatio – Part 2; *or, Alger finds sweetness out West*

Palace, a less expensive accommodation.

It was while staying at the Grand Hotel on March 3rd that Alger began *Joe's Luck*, which first appeared as a serial the following year in **New York Weekly**. The first edition was published in paper wrappers by A. L. Burt in September, 1887, as the first volume of the **Boys' Home Library Series**. During this trip, Alger also collected material for the four-volume **Pacific Series,** the first three titles issued by Loring (Boston) and the fourth title issued by his new publisher, Porter and Coates of Philadelphia.

Although Alger's primary reason for taking this (and subsequent) trips was to gather ideas and material for future books, he did not refrain from social activities when the opportunity was presented. Alger's arrival would occasionally be noted in local newspapers and this would invariably invoke invitations to schools, literary societies and other venues and events.

A few weeks after his arrival in San Francisco, Alger

was introduced to H[ubert] H[owe] Bancroft, a noted American historian, author and ethnologist.[4] Alger later based one of his characters in *Silas Snobden's Office Boy,* Samuel Graham, on Bancroft. Graham was an old gentleman writing a history of the Saracens when the hero, Frank Manton, returns his lost pocketbook containing research and book references from the Astor Library.[5]

In late March, Alger journeyed south and spent two weeks in Santa Barbara and Los Angeles. After returning to San Francisco for a few weeks Alger sailed for Portland, Oregon on a steamer. Using Portland as a hub, Alger took a two-day trip to The Dalles, then a small fishing community on the Columbia River. Additional trips to Salem, Oregon, and Victoria, British Columbia, filled out the rest of May 1877.

After spending the first part of June back in San Francisco, Alger took one more side trip, to Murphy's, California, located in Calaveras County, approximately 140 miles due east from San Francisco, nestled in the central Sierra Nevada mountain range. Murphy's was the site of numerous gold mines that had been long depleted by the time of Alger's arrival. Alger used this trip to Murphy's — and his third California visit in 1890 — to collect material for use in his 1892 novel, *Digging for Gold,* issued by Porter and Coates.

In mid-June, Alger departed California via rail on the Union Pacific. On the return trip he stopped again in Omaha to spend a few days at the Hitchcock home.[6]

The circumstances of how Alger met Louis Saroni are unknown, but as noted in Alger's letter to him (reproduced on page 6, including full transcription) they spent some time together in San Francisco. It may have been a chance meeting or Alger may have already known the family as they were originally from Boston.

In the letter, Alger refers to "your gift will sweeten the long hours of my transcontinental trip," no doubt a box of candy from the family business. The Grand Hotel was a few blocks west of the Saroni candy factory then located on Davis Street. The letter is dated only

"Friday Evening" on Grand Hotel stationery, which, based on the content, would imply Alger's imminent departure sometime in the middle of June 1877.

Louis was born in Boston in 1856 to Alexander Simon Saroni and Marianne Saroni, the fourth of five children. The family moved to San Francisco in the early 1870s and soon thereafter the Saroni family founded a candy and sugar business. As the business prospered, the company added nuts, rice, chewing gum, crackers and other food products to its line of merchandise. The Louis Saroni & Co. was the first on the West Coast to utilize steam to produce confectionery products. The business was chiefly a wholesaler, selling sugar and other foodstuffs to industrial manufacturers, but also operated several retail ventures.

Saroni founded and invested in other ancillary businesses in Los Angeles, Sacramento, Seattle, Portland and Salt Lake City. The Sweet Candy Company was formed in Portland, in 1892, by brothers Leon and Arthur Sweet, with an initial

Louis Saroni trade card, ca. 1900, listing a part of the firm's import product line.

$1,500 investment from Saroni who assumed the title of president.

In 1900, the company relocated to Utah to take advantage of local sugar refineries and nearby sugar beet farms. Initially producing licorice and jawbreakers, the company quickly expanded its product line to include hard and soft candies, marshmallows and all types of chocolates. The company was one of the first candy producers to wrap candy in see-through cellophane. The Sweet Candy Company is still in existence today.

Like most other businesses in San Francisco, the Great Earthquake of 1906 demolished the Saroni home and factories. Two days after the earthquake, on April 20, 1906, Alfred B. Saroni (son of founder Louis) established the Saroni Sugar & Rice Company in Oakland, California, with his father's backing. The Saroni family controlled this company, and various subsidiaries, until 1995 when it was sold to Garabedian, a food industry leader. Garabedian was subsequently acquired by Conagra Brands.

After 1910, Louis gradually withdrew from the sugar

Louis Saroni sales invoice from April 30, 1881. The term "Steam Works" was prominently displayed in company literature.

Letters from Horatio – Part 2; *or, Alger finds sweetness out West*

(Continued from Page 7)

and food business to focus primarily on real estate development, mostly in Alameda County. His son Alfred and his son, Alfred, Jr., ran the sugar businesses and his two grandchildren from his daughter, Cora Saroni (Kraemer), managed his real estate portfolio. Louis Saroni died of pneumonia on December 6, 1936, at the age of 80.

Next: Letters from Horatio – Part 3; or, Alger pads his resumé.

NOTES:

1. Gary Scharnhorst with Jack Bales, *The Lost Life of Horatio Alger, Jr.* 1985. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, p. 111.

2. Scharnhorst, p. 111.

3. Scharnhorst, p. 112.

4. Scharnhorst, p. 113.

5. Horatio Alger, Jr., *Silas Snobden's Office Boy*. 1973. New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., pp. 135-141.

6. Scharnhorst, p. 114.

Meditation Rock, where Mary Washington prayed for her son George during the Revolutionary War. Photo by Jack Bales

Convention update

(Continued from Page 5)

ney's 2009 Alger Society convention, "The Charlottesville Charivari." Charlottesville is a relatively easy (and very picturesque) drive from Fredericksburg along Route 20.

Another easy drive from Fredericksburg is Stratford Hall, a National Historic Landmark and the ancestral home of the Lee family, overlooking the cliffs of the Potomac River near Lerty, Virginia. From its home page: "Four generations of the Lee family passed through its stately doors, including Richard Henry Lee and Francis Lightfoot Lee, the only two brothers to sign the Declaration of Independence, Revolutionary War hero 'Light Horse Harry' Lee, and his son, Civil War General Robert E. Lee, who was born at Stratford Hall in 1807."

Visitors to Stratford Hall and its nearly 2,000 acres can revel in breathtaking views of the Potomac and tour the 18th-century Great House, the gardens, a coach house, a gristmill, and nature trails. "Telling the stories of the Lees, the enslaved and indentured laborers, and the women of Stratford Hall inspires our understanding and commitment to our nation's history."

Our banquet speaker Saturday night is scheduled to be Scott H. Harris, Executive Director of the University of Mary Washington Museums and Director of the James Monroe Museum in Fredericksburg. America's fifth president was born in nearby Colonial Beach, Virginia. The 40-acre site includes walking trails and a replica of the Monroe homestead.

Scott will have much more to say about James Monroe and his legacy at our convention banquet. I look forward to welcoming him — and Horatio Alger Society members — to "Frank and Fearless in Fredericksburg" in June.

By the way, convention attendees will find much of interest in Fredericksburg's downtown stores and shops, and I will discuss some of the antique malls and book stores in the March-April **Newsboy**.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Dear Bill,

The latest **Newsboy** contained a wide assortment of material, and I enjoyed it very much. I was not at all familiar with L.P. Wyman, and your article provided some fascinating information. You mentioned Doug Harding's bookstore in Wells, Maine. Years ago, when I was collecting the books of historical novelist Kenneth Roberts (and researching and writing about his life and works), I bought books from Doug by mail and stopped in his store once.

In my convention coverage, I have focused on a great many historic sites of Fredericksburg, Virginia, but book collectors and lovers of antique and vintage items will find much to interest them in the city's downtown area.

Admittedly, these are not the huge used-book stores that once populated large cities, but there are a couple of places that members may like, and I have seen series books in both of them. One store in particular has various rooms loaded with both books and antiques.

The many thrift, vintage, and antique stores downtown usually have at least one book alcove, and I've come across some of the newer series books from time to time. Two large antique stores are on the same corner and I have come across a few Porter & Coates Algers at nominal costs. In one store I bought two wooden four-drawer 4" x 6" file card holders — they are marvelous for holding note cards for my research project. I saw — but did not buy — an *Errand Boy* game based on Alger's book.

More information on book and antique collecting in Fredericksburg will be in the next issue of **Newsboy**.

Cordially,
Jack Bales (PF-258)
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P.S.: I gave my Feb. 16 Zoom webinar presentation on Horatio Alger as part of the University of Mary Washington's "Great Lives" educational outreach program. The talk was pre-recorded, but the Q&A portion was live that evening.

For those who did not register and participate live on Feb. 16, the presentation has been archived on the Great Lives website, and it can be watched anytime without Zoom. Just go to the UMW website and click on the link for the talk at www.umw.edu/greatlives/

This fine speaking program has attracted dozens of well-known authors (including quite a few Pulitzer

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Prize winners), but this semester the presentations are online only.

The talk concluded with information about the Horatio Alger Society and our June 3-6 convention. Incidentally, I photographed some of Rob Kasper's books to illustrate my PowerPoint presentation.

———————

Dear Bill,

In my last letter I mentioned some upcoming Leo Edwards news. So, here it is. Recently, Mary Ann was scrolling through some Edwards' listings on eBay when she came up with a seller with some signed books. All had been autographed to the same person, and I found after I got to the site that several had already been sold. All the books were signed to the same boy, and many had the Bert Salg-designed bookplate glued to the front pastedown. It seems to me that he must have sent books to Leo that he bought, requesting his signature and a bookplate each time (and including return postage). Since he lived in Uniontown, Pa., it is unlikely that he traveled to Wisconsin every time he bought a new Edwards book. The books published after 1937 do not carry the bookplate.

However, a signed copy of *Jerry Todd and Flying Flapdoodle* was still available. This book was not only signed, but Leo stated in the inscription that the boy had a poem published in the "Our Chatter Box" section. I have a number of signed Edwards, but none of them were specifically for having a poem published in Leo's "Our Chatter Box." Leo not only noted that in the inscription, but gave the page number. And as I went through the photos provided, I noticed a sheet of cheap paper with a poem printed on it, in pencil, that had been originally folded quite a few times. It had been laid in the book and had caused its paper to tone considerably, indicating that it had been there for a long time (the paper otherwise shows no toning at all).

Obviously, it was the original poem that this boy had sent to Leo, which he laid back into the book when he signed it. I have never seen an enclosure of this type before, although Leo received thousands of these letters over the years. I assumed they were routinely destroyed, and many likely were. But it may have been that all of those that were printed in his "Our Chatter Box" section were returned with the signed books. One of the give-aways here, indicating the poem is not a copy made by the boy, is the number of times the letter had been folded originally. People often used much smaller envelopes in those days than are used today (I have several that are about 2" x 3"). A small envelope like this would explain the folds. This was, by the way, the final book to contain a "Chatter Box." G&D killed the project, which was likely not cost-effective, and also caused their author to spend more time away from turning out actual books than they could justify. Another victim of the Depression.

A few years ago I bought two letters (typed letters signed from 1938 and 1939) by Leo to a young man who had obviously written to him a number of times. He was interested in illustration, and he sent drawings to Leo for criticism. Leo mentioned at the end of his reply that if the sender wanted the drawings back, he would hold them for a week, which implied to me that if he hadn't received postage for their return by then, he would dispose of them. So I don't think it likely that he kept much of this material around, as interesting as it would be today. I'd appreciate hearing from anyone having something similar in his or her collection.

By the way, I checked the books this seller had already sold, and none of them had anything laid in. This was Leo's policy from the beginning of the "Chatter Box" era (1929 to 1934); no one could have more than one poem published, and future letters or poems, while they might be interesting to Leo, would not make it into the books.

Best wishes for 2021; please stay safe.

Bart J. Nyberg (PF-879)
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Dear Bill,

I got my latest **Newsboy** and was pleased to see my letter to the editor about *The Gallant Crosby*. It looked great!

I see that Jack Bales has been making great progress on his plans for the convention at Fredericksburg in June, and I'm beginning to be guardedly optimistic that enough of us likely attendees will have gotten our COVID vaccines by then and that the convention may actually be held. Most of us are old enough to move into one of the early tiers for vaccination, one of the few areas where the advanced age of the H.A.S. membership works in our favor.

If there is enough down time in the convention, or before or after, I am writing to invite you to my house for a visit. Charlottesville is only a bit more than an hour away from Fredericksburg, and I'd be more than happy to drive you here from there or there from here and then take you to your next destination after that. My wife, Judy, and I would be glad to put you up for the night and/or treat you to a couple of meals. I'd very much like to show you the latest additions to my collection, and to talk books with you even more than we will at the convention itself.

All good wishes,
Jeff Looney (PF-903)
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Alger and Algebra

or, the trials and triumphs of a complex fraction
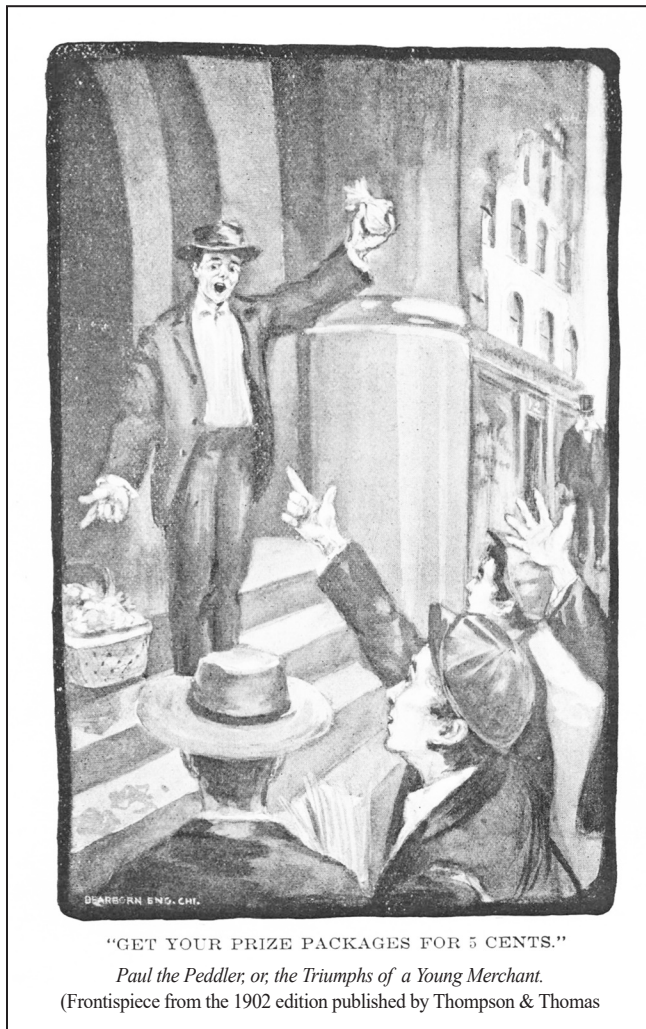
By Keith H. Thompson (PF-035)

Alger story plots frequently outline the formal and informal educations of the youths in the title role, ranging from Ragged Dick who "could now read well, write a fair hand and had studied arithmetic as far as Interest" to college prep student John Oakley (*Luck and Pluck*) who "stood first in his class at the academy in Latin and Greek.

Latin and Greek are the subjects foremost mentioned, but mathematics often plays a significant role. Alger devotes an entire chapter of *Julius the Street Boy* to the deficiencies of the winter schoolmaster, Theophilus Slocum. The First class in arithmetic is studying complex fractions, and a student asks for help with the "fifth sum." Slocum ahems, "I dare say it seems hard to you, but to one who has studied the higher branches of mathematics as I have, it is, I say, as easy as the multiplication table." He takes his slate, works on the problem during recess and announces, "I think I know why it is that you didn't get it." "Why, sir?" "Because the answer in the book is wrong."

The boys very quickly perceive that the new teacher is a humbug and appoint Julius to bait him the next day with the "eleventh sum" which they suspect also he cannot solve.

[*Julius the Street Boy*, Page 166; reproduced on Page 13]

Julius can both solve and elucidate the problem, but instead "covers the board with a confused mass of figures, finally bringing out the fraction (111/846)." Slocum; however, is equal to the challenge and says, "I see that these sums are too difficult for the class. I shall put you back at the beginning of fractions." The boys are dismayed, and "seeing that their subterfuge is likely to

"GET YOUR PRIZE PACKAGES FOR 5 CENTS."

Paul the Peddler, or, the Triumphs of a Young Merchant.
(Frontispiece from the 1902 edition published by Thompson & Thomas

cost them dear," Julius returns to the board and performs the calculation correctly.

The "sum in complex fractions" under consideration is, "if seven is the denominator of the following fraction (nine and one quarter divided by twelve and seven eights), what is its value when reduced to a simple fraction?" This nonsense would appear to be a contrived and none too clever product of Alger's imagination, but it betrays a familiarity with mathematics that manifests itself in different ways in many stories.

Fred Vivian (*Shifting for Himself*) is asked by his father, "What lessons have you to-night, Fred?" "I have my Latin and some hard sums in *Reduction.*"

Dan Mordaunt (*Dan the Detective*) is asked, "How much will six percent interest make it amount to in a year?" "Five dollars and thirty cents," answered Dan, promptly. "Good! I see you have not forgotten what you learned in school." "I have ciphered through cube root," said Dan,

Alger and Algebra

with some pride. "I am not sure whether I remember that now, but I could do any sum in square root."

Alger street arabs and boys with little or no formal education are invariably quick witted and accurate in making change and in budgeting their pennies towards shelter and entertainment.

Jane Lindsay (*Tattered Tom*) knows exactly how many pennies she can divert to a restaurant breakfast without attracting Granny's suspicious and malevolent attention.

Abner Sands (*Robert Coverdale's Struggle*) is making change. "Lemme see. Fifty-eight from two dollars leaves a dollar'n thirty-two cents." "Forty-two," corrected Robert. "I declare, so it does! You are a good hand at subtraction."

Paul Hoffman (*Paul the Peddler*) makes up and sells prize candy packages. "Do you want to know how much I've made, mother?" asked Paul, looking up at length from his calculation. "Yes, Paul." "A dollar and thirty cents. Listen, and I will tell you how I stand:

One pound of candy	*20*
Two packs of envelopes	*10*
Prizes	*90*
That makes	*1.20*

"I sold fifty packages at five cents each, and that brought me in two dollars and a half. Taking out the expenses, it leaves me with a dollar and thirty cents."

Henry Martin (*Sam's Chance*) studies "sums" at home in the evening on a "tattered arithmetic and a slate and pencil." His roommate Sam Barclay (*The Young Outlaw*) asks to see an example, and Henry exhibits, "John Smith borrowed $546.75 at 7 percent, and repaid it at the end of two years, five months, and six days. What amount was he required to pay?" Henry explains the methods he would use to obtain the solution, and Sam asks, "what's the use of it, anyways, staying up nights studying?" Henry replies, "If you are going to be a business man, you may need to understand interest. I shouldn't expect to be promoted if I didn't know something about arithmetic."

Alger had a strong sense of the difference in the quality of mathematical instruction between country schools and among college preparatory academies such as he himself had attended. He notes that Socrates Smith, A. M., Master of Smith Institute (*Hector's Inheritance*), "was shrewd enough not to attempt to instruct the classes in advanced classics or *arithmetic*," but that "Penhurst Academy (*Andy*

Grant's Pluck) had a fine reputation, due in large part to the high character and gifts of Dr. Crabb who had been the principal for twenty-five years."

Ephraim Onthank (*Rupert's Ambition*) is applying for a clerk's position, and his father is asked, "Has your son a fair education?" "He attended the district school till he was fifteen." "Then I suppose he is up on the fundamental rules of arithmetic?" "What's them? I suppose he can add, *substract* and multiply."

Nathan Burbank has been engaged to teach the summer term in the town of Granton. Alger tells us, "it is the usual custom in New England that the summer schools be taught by females, but that on this occasion, the students being so unruly, that a male teacher was hired even though he asked fifty percent higher for his services." Student aptitude for mathematics appears to be challenged when the class is charged with a solution for "the square root of 625." Student after student fails, but Harry Walton (*Bound to Rise*) knows the correct answer, and Alger devotes two pages to his lengthy and tedious solution.

Curtis Waring (*Adrift in New York*) asks, "Has he any education?" "Well, I haven't sent him to boarding school or college," answered Tim. "He don't know no Greek, or Latin, or *mathematics* — phew, that's a hard word! You didn't tell me you wanted him made a scholar of."

Not every Alger character finds the study of mathematics palatable. Mrs. Morton (*Ralph Raymond's Heir*) is quoted, "But I haven't a head for arithmetic, and don't want to have. I always despised it." Indeed, Alger is guilty of harboring the male chauvinistic tenets of his day.

Mrs. Clifton (*Mark the Match Boy*) is described as a "silly woman, who was fond of attention, and was incapable of talking sensibly."

In describing "Mrs. F" (*Jed the Poorhouse Boy*), Alger writes, "When Fogson married her, he caught a Tartar as he found out to his cost."

Aunt Rachel (*Jack's Ward*), regarding education, says, "Readin', writin' *cipherin'* was enough for girls in my day. What's the use of stuffin' the girl's head full of nonsense that'll never do her no good."

My own favorite example is a quatrain that Alger composed for *Charlie Codman's Cruise*. Charlie's mother is governess to Bertha Bowman and asks, "Do you know anything of arithmetic?" "Yes," said Bert, "I know some lines about it. Charlie Morrill taught me them one day."

> *Multiplication is vexation,*
> *Division is as bad*
> *The rule of three doth trouble me*
> *And practice makes me mad.*

Alger is more flexible on the issue of suffrage. Victor Vane is asked, "Young man, are you in favor of female

JULIUS;

OR,

THE STREET BOY OUT WEST.

BY

HORATIO ALGER, JR.,

AUTHOR OF "RAGGED DICK SERIES," "TATTERED TOM SERIES,"
"LUCK AND PLUCK SERIES," "CAMPAIGN SERIES," ETC.

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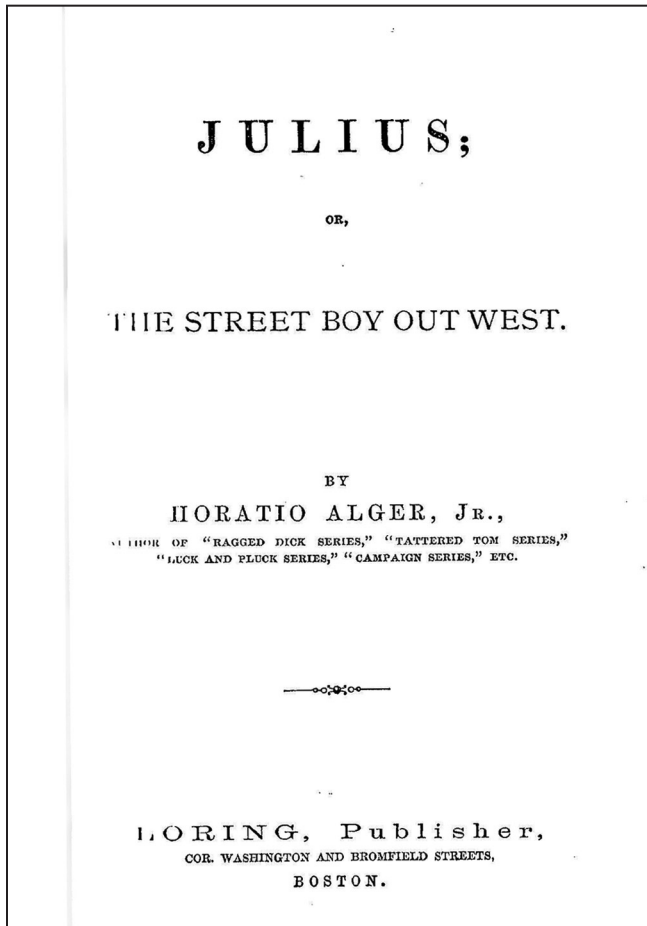
166   JULIUS; OR,

Accordingly at recess Julius went up to the teacher gravely, and said, "Mr. Slocum, will you tell me how to do this sum?"

"Ahem! let me see it," said the teacher.

He took the book and read the following example: —

"If 7 is the denominator of the following fraction, $\frac{9\frac{1}{4}}{12\frac{2}{3}}$, what is its value when reduced to a simple fraction?"

Now this ought not to present any difficulty to a teacher; but Mr. Slocum had tried it at home, and knew he could not do it. He relied upon some one of the scholars to do it on the board, and as he decided in his own mind, from his experience of the day before, that Julius was most to be relied upon, he was dismayed by receiving such an application from our hero.

"It is rather a difficult example," he said, slowly. "Have you tried it?"

"Yes, sir."

Julius had tried it, and obtained the correct answer; but this he did not think it necessary to mention.

---

suffrage?" "Yes," answered Victor. "I have a mother, and I think she has as much right to vote as her husband."

Most of the title heroes are enthusiastic about education in general and mathematics in particular. Ned Newton is asked, "Are you good at figures?" He replies, "Arithmetic is my favorite study, but I have not been to school since I was twelve years old."

Ben Barclay (*The Store Boy*) is quoted, "Arithmetic and algebra are my favorite studies. … I have taken lessons in bookkeeping at home, and, though it seems like boasting, I was better in mathematics than any of my school-fellows."

Robert Coverdale studies at home and says, "I'll try this sum in cube root. I got it wrong the last time I tried. When I left school I had only got through fractions. That's seventy-five pages back, and I understand all that I have tried since."

Phil Brent (*The Errand Boy*) is asked by a prospective employer, "Are you good at accounts? … What is the interest of eight hundred and forty-five dollars and sixty cents for four years, three months and twelve days at eight and one-half percent?" Phil's pen moved fast in perfect silence for five minutes and then he announced the result. "Entirely correct," said the old gentleman, for he himself was an adept at figures.

The stern, merciless instructor of mathematics portrayed in several Stratemeyer series (*Putnam Hall, Rover Boys*) stands on a low rung on the ladder of student affection and is invariably the butt of jokes and the victim of pranks. Alger is more respectful, perhaps a reflection of his own educational experience, but does recognize that many schoolboys resent the discipline of mathematical study. Walter Sherwood is hosting an expensive supper for a select group of fellow frivolous Euclid College classmates, and in his remarks says, "brothers, let us forget this happy evening, that there are such things as logarithms, and sines, and tangents, and Greek tragedies. I have expressly requested Mr. Daniels to provide no logarithms tonight. They do not agree with my constitution."

The principles of bookkeeping play an important role in the education of several Alger heroes. Lester Grey (*Lester's Luck*) is "ambitious to qualify himself for a

Alger and Algebra

(Continued from Page 13)

higher position, and makes arrangements to learn book-keeping at a commercial academy which had evening sessions." Asked by his employer, "Have you a pretty good insight into bookkeeping?" he is able to reply, "So my teacher tells me." "Then I will send you out in two weeks." "Then, sir, I will leave the office and devote my whole time to study, with special reference to bank bookkeeping." The reader will recall that bookkeepers in firms where the hero is employed are frequently villains, and the bookkeeper in the West Moultrie Bank of Montana, of which Lester's employer is the principal stockholder, is no exception.

Ernest Ray (*The Young Bank Messenger*) is asked by a prospective employer, "Do you know how to keep books?" "I understand single entry bookkeeping." "Good, that will be all you will require."

Many Alger heroes have had their studies at college prep schools interrupted through the death of a parent, and later in the plot they are able to use their education to advantage. Walter Conrad's father dies, and Walter (*Luck and Pluck*) is forced to earn his living. His travels take him to Portland, Wisconsin, and he applies for the position as teacher of Latin in the grammar school. Asked for his qualifications, he says, "I am studying Latin, Greek and *mathematics*. I was in the sixth book of Caesar when I left the Essex Classical Institute, and I read the Latin Reader through before commencing Caesar. My father meant me to enter Columbia College."

For purposes of comic relief, Alger frequently introduces an unnecessary and exaggerated character, usually a foppish dresser or society wannabe, but also on occasion he coins a pun or employs a simple mathematical calculation:

• ***Risen From The Ranks:*** "Willie is always fond of *pie*," said his father. "In a printing office *pi* is not such a favorite."

• ***Rupert's Ambition:*** "Five hundred dollars a month?" asked the farmer, much impressed. "Why, that's six thousand dollars a year." "Exactly. You are good in arithmetic," said the young man, languidly.

• ***Andy Grant's Pluck:*** "I am to help a boy about his Latin in the evening. I shall get five dollars a week for that, too. "What! ten dollars a week in all? You are right. I give you credit for your mathematical talent."

• ***No. 91:*** "I've passed a ten and a five, and that gives you seven and a half for your share?" "Right you are, Barclay. Your knowledge of arithmetic does credit to

your education."

In summary, Alger frequently uses mathematics, the teachers, and the schoolhouse or academy environment to help describe a boy's ambition and progression from shop boy to lawyer or store boy to junior partner. To what extent may we be permitted to say that his narratives were colored and drawn from his own educational experience?

Horatio Alger, Jr. was born on Friday the 13th of January 1832 in the small village of Chelsea, where his father ordained over the First Congregational Church and Society.[1] Alger was tutored at home until the age of 10 due to "delicate health" and straitened financial circumstances occasioned by the growing family and his father's meager ministerial compensation. The Harvard Class Book of 1852 in the Harvard University Archives[2] includes a long memoir in Alger's hand describing his early life and education:

> *I had accordingly attained the age of six before I was initiated into the mysteries of the alphabet. From this epoch my progress was, I believe, more than ordinarily rapid. At eight years of age I commenced the study of Latin and Algebra, which were rather premature as it will be easily believed that I was not at that time too familiar with the common branches of an English education. Until the age of ten I had passed very little time in attendance at a public school.*
>
> *At the age of ten I was sent to the Grammar School in my native town, where I remained for about a year and a half pursuing English studies exclusively . . . in the month of December, 1844, my parents removed to Marlborough . . . there was in this place a small academy under the superintendence of Mr. O. W. Albee, a graduate of Brown, and quite a respectable scholar, though his tastes inclined him rather to the mathematics and physical sciences than to the classics. To these my own tastes were directly opposed: possibly this was of advantage to me as it tended to equalize the time which I devoted to these various branches. Though the idea had been long entertained, now for the first time I commenced a course of study preparatory to entering college. Beneath the elm trees in front of Gates Academy I have conned many a lesson in Latin, Greek and mathematics.*

In 1848 at age 16, Alger took the entrance examinations for the freshman class at Harvard College. He was expected to show proficiency in Latin, Greek, Mathematics and History. To graduate, a student was obliged to complete six semesters of Greek, six semesters of Latin and Roman literature, and four each of math, physics and philosophy. At that time, the college faculty was a

"firmament of stars," and the four semesters of mathematics, usually taken in the freshman and sophomore years, would have been rigid and rigorous.

Thus, "introduced as a child to classical language, *advanced mathematics* and theology" [3] and prepared for college at the Gates Academy in Marlborough under a teacher of superior mathematical achievement, Alger was well equipped to use the education of his characters, whether attained at home or in the classroom, to inform his readers as to the level of success his fictional characters could be expected to achieve. References range from the sarcastic to the highly intellectual. Scharnhorst writes, " Alger occasionally betrayed his erudition in his formulaic juvenile fiction . . . alluding to such ideas as the doctrine of probabilities promulgated by the French philosopher Pierre Simon Laplace." As evidence of erudition, he quotes James Grey (*Tom the Bootblack*):

"… he is not likely to find me here on the banks of the Mississippi, fifteen hundred miles away. According to the doctrine of probabilities, he was doubtless correct. It was not likely, but then events often bid defiance to the probabilities, and such was the case now."

Scharnhorst's interpretation of this paragraph is remarkably perceptive. Early probability theory owes much to French gambling houses and French scholars, including Laplace, who were asked to provide accurate odds for games of chance such as the popular coincidence or matching game, *rencontre*. [4]

* * *

In preparation for this essay, the author read 105 Alger titles for content with special attention to mathematical and baseball references. This was not a hardship for one who has read Alger since childhood upon finding a box of Donohue and New York Book Co. editions, dating from my father's youth, in the basement of our home in Rochester, Michigan. Unfortunately, my father's then current taste in literature leaned more to Chaucer and Matthew Arnold, and with the quote from the *First Epistle to the Corinthians* — *When I was a child, I spoke as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child, but when I became a man, I put away childish things* — ringing in my ears, I was not permitted to bring them upstairs under proper lighting.

I have just embarked upon my tenth decade, the lighting deficiency has been corrected, and re-reading the Alger canon has been rewarded with a familiar and treasured pleasure.

H.A.S. President Cary Sternick's call to authors for topics of special occupational interest provided incentive, and I have benefited from the encouragement of Brad Chase, who I suspect, has never met an Alger topic he didn't like.

The discussion and interpretation of Alger's education is attributed entirely to the unique scholarship of Gary Scharnhorst and Jack Bales.

NOTES:

1. Scharnhorst, Gary with Jack Bales. *The Lost Life of Horatio Alger, Jr.* 1985. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press.

2. Scharnhorst, Gary and Jack Bales. *Horatio Alger, Jr.: An Annotated Bibliography of Comment and Criticism.* 1981. Metuchen, NJ & London: The Scarecrow Press, Inc.

3. Scharnhorst, Gary. *Horatio Alger, Jr.* 1980. Boston: Twayne Publishers.

4. Feller, William. *An Introduction to Probability Theory and Its Applications, Volume I.* 1957. New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

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