

The Evening Spirit.

BY ALBERT BIGELOW PAINE.



It was the close of a dismal December day. I had not lighted the gas, and had been sitting for some time alone in the gathering dusk. It rested me after a hard day to sit thus thinking of various things. Now I fell to watching a mottled square of electric light that appeared in the same place regularly each evening, and that, absurdly enough, always suggested to my imagination a large, quarter-doubled and gorgeously printed newspaper.

I had remarked the effect a good many times before, and did so now, half unconsciously, for my mind had suddenly reverted to my old friend Philip Farrington, aged twenty-five, and unmarried, a bright newspaper man, and one of the keenest business managers in the State. Furthermore, he was handsome, tender-hearted, and made friends.

We had known each other in the East, and had come West together during the boom. Philip, at present, was publishing a weekly paper in a neighboring town.

Rising at length and locking my desk, I was just turning to go when there came a knock at my office door, and a messenger boy stumbled in, feeling his way toward me in the dim light.

"I thought mebbe you was here yet," he said, handing me a yellow envelope.

I tore it open, and holding the telegram in range of the electric rays, read:—

"Be in on 7.30 train.

"Farrington."

I glanced hastily at my watch. It was just seven. I signed the boy's book, and we left the office together. As it was a slippery, disagreeable night, the street cars uncertain, I decided

to walk to the station, and had barely reached it when the 7.30 express, with its one bloody eye, came grinding and grumbling to the platform. A moment later Farrington was beside me.

"Hello, old fellow, how are you? Carriage? No, thanks; rather walk up — want to see your town. What's your population? How's your newspaper?"

Farrington was evidently full of some scheme and inclined to proceed to it at once.

"Much business done here?" he continued without pausing.

"The country trade on the square is very large," I said meekly.

"Um — um — how many merchants have you?"

"Why, really, Farrington, I couldn't say. I —"

"Don't attend much to statistics, eh?"

"No, that is —"

"How do you advertise — pretty freely?"

Farrington shot these questions at me as if he were firing them out of a popgun.

"Really, Phil," I pleaded, "don't load and fire quite so rapidly. I believe we have a very respectable lot of merchants both as to number and quality, at least —"

"Well, I'll tell you," he said, breaking in again, "I like the looks of your town. It is a good town — you claim fifteen thousand, but ten will cover it to the edges. You've only got one daily; you need two. I've come here to start the second. Sold out over yonder — just closed up the trade to-day; what do you think of it?" — turning suddenly under a street lamp and facing me.

"I am sure, Philip," I ventured to say, "if there is a field, no one could fill it better than yourself."

"Well, the field is here. I've had this town in mind a long time. Been planning the thing for months; going to call the paper *Spirit* — *Evening Spirit*; good name — don't you think?"

"Capital, Phil."

"Yes, I've got it all in my mind, just how it will look in type — title, headlines, and all. I can see it right before me now. To-morrow I'll stay here with you to look about a little and talk it over. Monday I'll go to the city for my outfit. I want to be

ready for the first issue New Year's day, see?" and Farrington slapped me on the back with energy.

"Mosby will be terribly cut up over it; he has had his own way so long."

"Mosby of *The Radical*, you mean. Take me to see him tomorrow. Good fellow, I understand, but can't expect to have this to himself always. Somebody bound to come. Friend of yours, is he?"

"Yes, we have been very good friends, indeed, so far."

I could see it all in Mosby's face when we called. The poor fellow had worked hard, and with no great amount of talent had really served us faithfully. Farrington told him openly what he intended to do, and explained the situation in his business-like manner. The blow had fallen. Mosby felt himself prepared for a rival, but not for a man like Farrington. He gave him the right hand of fellowship, and welcomed him with a smile, but he was very pale. I would have given much at that moment not to have been Philip Farrington's friend.

Philip was thoroughly saturated with his plans. The next morning when I accompanied him to the train his last words were of the new daily. Even when the train rolled away from the station, his head was out of the window, and I caught the words, "plate service, specials, seven-column folio, pony camel —" then his voice was lost in the rushing of iron wheels, and a cloud of smoke drifted down between us, blotting out his face, as I supposed, for at least a week.

But lo, three hours later he returned. Thirty miles away there was a broken rail and a wreck. A number of people had been scratched and bruised, and one killed; that one he who at morning had parted from me so full of life, and hope, and vigor; now he lay before me a crushed, inanimate nothing.

His injuries were mainly internal, and his handsome face showed only a slight cut on the forehead. As I looked at that face and that senseless body, I wondered dimly what had become of that fierce energy — that intense force of will which had made it, but a few hours since, a power that had commanded our love, our reverence, and our fear.

I telegraphed to his relatives in the East, and that night I

looked upon him for the last time. He was going back to those who had shed tears at parting, and would shed tears more bitter now, at his return.

I do not think Mosby's splendid eulogy that day was in anywise affected by the fact that Philip's death had removed a dreaded rival. Mosby is a fair-minded man, and Philip had really won his regard during their one brief interview.

As for me, I seemed to have been asleep in my chair, and the past forty-eight hours were as a bad dream.

December, gloomy and dark, dragged along to the holidays. My friend's death had cast a shadow about me, and the Christmas festivities had little in them to make me glad. The January term of court was coming on, and I had a number of cases on the docket. I remained housed up most of the time trying to forget everything else in preparing them for trial.

The new year came in bleak and cold. I stayed all day in my office reading over old letters, and trying to write to friends long neglected. It being a holiday, I had locked the office door, for I had worked hard of late, and did not wish to see any one. About four in the afternoon I closed my desk and, feeling somewhat worn, lay down on a couch that stood near the door and on the opposite side of the room. As I did so, my mind reverted to Philip Farrington; I recalled him as I had last seen him looking from the car window.

"Poor boy," I thought, "to-day he was to have run his first issue. How intensely earnest he was in his purpose. What an immense will force he had. Poor boy."

"E-e-evening Spirit!!"

A voice just at my elbow had shouted these words. I started to my feet, and turning quickly, was just in time to see the door close and a folded paper drop noiselessly to the floor!

I looked at both in amazement. I could have sworn that the door had been locked, in fact it had been tried that day by a number of people who had gone away grumbling at my supposed absence. I stared at the white square lying on the floor. There it lay, a neatly printed sheet apparently, folded so as to reveal the first few letters of the dashing autograph title, the design for which Philip had shown me the first evening of his arrival. What

could it mean? I felt myself turning queer, then suddenly leaned forward to pick up the paper.

As I did so it seemed to me that its bright, black letters began to blur. I closed my eyes involuntarily to clear my vision. When I opened them a second later it was gone. I rushed to the door. It was locked.

I dropped into a chair, feeling decidedly weak. "This will never do," I said dryly, "never in the world. I must see a doctor at once. I haven't been feeling very well lately, and I need some medicine. I must be pretty bad off to have a turn like that."

I put on my hat and went down into the street to look up a doctor. As I turned a corner I came face to face with Mosby. He was hurrying, and I thought he looked pale.

"Oh," he said nervously, "I was just going to see you. A very strange thing has happened — unparalleled, in fact," and he shivered until his teeth chattered audibly.

"What is it, Mosby?" I said, catching something of his disease.

"Come back to my office. We do not get out a paper to-day, and the building is empty. I was there alone. I want to talk to you."

Arriving at the office of *The Radical*, we entered and passed on into Mosby's little den at the left.

"It is very strange," repeated Mr. Mosby, "very remarkable indeed," then he paused as if in doubt how to proceed.

"Twenty minutes ago," he continued, after some hesitation, "I was sitting at this desk getting some copy ready for to-morrow. The outside door was locked to keep out stragglers and 'old subscribers' with New Year's advice. I had just begun writing when all at once my mind turned to your friend Farrington. I recollected that he had intended running his first issue to-day. As God is my witness, at that moment my office door was pushed open and a boy's voice called '*Evening Spirit!*' and a paper was dropped in on the floor! I was terribly startled, and sat looking at it a moment before stooping to pick it up. I saw part of the title, but that was all. When I reached down to get it, it vanished like mist. I was too frightened for a moment to move. Then I rushed out to find you. I suppose you think I'm drunk or sick,

but I haven't had a drop and I am perfectly well," and Mosby glared at me with considerable defiance.

"No," I said, with some agitation, "you are not sick or drunk — at least not in the ordinary way. I, also, am a subscriber to this Evening Spirit." And I related my own experience while he stared at me with mouth and eyes wide open.

"Do you suppose," he asked, in an awed voice, when I had finished, "that he has a very large circulation?"

"I think not, Mosby; I think it will hardly extend beyond us two."

"Twouldn't be fair, you know," said Mosby, with a grim smile, and regaining his courage enough to see the humor of the situation. "Material can't cost much there — help all free — no expenses. I couldn't compete, could I?"

"But if he treated other subscribers as he does us, the competition wouldn't count for anything. Do you suppose he'll come to-morrow?"

Mosby shivered and turned pale again.

"Don't know, I'm sure; I hope not. What will you do if he does?"

"Endeavor to read it without trying to get hold of it," I replied; "maybe we'll get some celestial information." Then, becoming grave again, "Mosby," I said, "seriously speaking, this is a very remarkable manifestation of will force exerted after dissolution of life and mortality. A most unusual continuation of earthly purpose in the unseen. As a matter of science, it seems to me our duty to report the facts to The Society of Psychical Research."

Mosby smiled in a sickly way and started to say something, but hesitated. Finally, seeing encouragement in my face, "I was about to say," he resumed sheepishly, "don't you think we'd better try and be together when he delivers the next issue?"

"Good suggestion. Come over at four to-morrow. I'll make it a point to be there alone; we can lock the door, then, and wait results."

While we had been talking it had grown dusk. As I rose to go, Mosby rose also, in spite of my assurance that I could find my way out.

"Oh, I am going, too," he said hastily; "I am quite through with my work, that is, it will keep — no importance whatever," and Mosby pushed me out of the dusky office and closed the door after us with what seemed to me unnecessary haste. Out on the pavement we shook hands and separated.

Next morning court opened, and during the forenoon I had little time to think about The Spirit.

Then the criminal docket had begun to grind, and the case in hand being one in which I had no interest, I left a little before four, and watching my chance until no one was about, I slipped into my office and locked the door. A few moments later there were three light knocks, and I opened it for Mosby. Then once more turning the key, I seated myself in a chair opposite him, one of us on each side of the door. We conversed but little and in whispers. By and by we heard a step coming up the stairs. My heart beat so loudly that I wondered if Mosby could hear it. But the caller, whoever it was, had too heavy a tread for a spirit. He came stumbling up the stairs, rattled at the door, and went away using bad language. I looked at my watch. It lacked twenty minutes of five. My hand shook so that I could hardly get it back into my pocket. The light in the office was beginning to grow dim.

"Better — light — the gas," jerked out Mosby, "so if it comes late — we can see to read it."

There was a jet not far from the door; I managed to strike a match and turned on a full blaze; then we both felt better, but for the next half hour neither spoke. The clock across the street struck five, then the quarter hour. The suspense was becoming oppressive.

"Must have gone to press late," said Mosby, in a loud whisper.

I laughed out, but my voice sounded harsh and strange, and silenced us both.

"*E-evening Spirit!!*"

We bounded from our chairs like a couple of jacks-in-the-box, Mosby with such force that his chair fell backward. The locked door opened about a foot, and an unseen carrier had called out the words and pitched the paper into the room. It lay on the

floor just as I had seen it before, the first letters of the title and three columns of telegraph turned up to view.

"Don't try to touch it, Mosby," I said hoarsely; "we must read it."

By this time I had drawn my chair as close to it as I dared, and now sat down and stooped as low over the printed page as possible. It lay there as plainly visible in the gaslight as reality itself. Mosby, suddenly becoming brave, got down eagerly on his knees beside me, wholly intercepting my view, and bending over it so low that it seemed as if he meant to smell of it.

"Good impression," he said, with enthusiasm, "but type a little worn; must have got a second-hand outfit. Headlines a trifle crowded. First two columns plate, third column Associated Press dispatches. I didn't know they had wires *there*,"—with a husky laugh. "But they seem to have all the modern improvements. Composition good—spacing neat and regular. By the holy Moses, a typographical error! So they make mistakes over there, too."

Evidently, Mosby was more interested in the make-up of the paper than in its contents. Suddenly, however, he became silent. A moment later he looked up at me, pointing to a paragraph in the Associated Press column. I bent over and read:—

BLOOMINGDALE, KANS., January 2.

The proprietor of *The Evening Radical* of this place, after due consideration, has altered the name of his very worthy paper to *The Evening Spirit*, it having been decided that the old name was somewhat too pronounced for the advanced liberality of Western ideas. The first issue under the new name appears to-day with the New Year.

I was about to remark something, when suddenly I noticed that the atmosphere of the room had assumed a bluish cast. I started up and looked at the light; it was like cobalt. I looked at Mosby—his face was like indigo! Then something grasped me by the throat, and the room began to whirl around as it does when one turns rapidly on his heel. I struggled for breath and tried to cry out. Then all was black—the light had gone out—Mosby was gone—the paper was gone—I was alone in the choking, whirling darkness. I made one final fierce effort for breath, regained it, and with a cry of relief—awoke!

I was sitting half upright on the couch in my office. The room was dark except the white, mottled, electric square that blinked and trembled above my desk.

I sat up and stared about me half dazed. There was no doubt about it, I had been asleep; and the startling events of the past twenty-four hours had been a dream!

I began to collect myself. The big clock across the street was striking. I counted. It struck six. There was an uncanny feeling in my blood, and I made no unnecessary delay about getting downstairs to the cold, fresh air. Half way down the block I met Mosby.

"Ah," he said, "Happy New Year; little late, but I haven't seen you to-day, until now; I was just thinking about you. Do you know," he continued briskly, "I have decided to change the name of my paper. Present title a little too old style, you know — just a trifle too decided, and do you know, I am going to take Farrington's title, *The Spirit — Evening Spirit*. Poor fellow, he don't need it now, and wouldn't care, I guess. Begin the year to-morrow under the new name. Good name, don't you think?"

"Yes, Mosby," I answered as soon as I could speak; "yes, it is a good name, a very excellent name, and I am quite sure Farrington will not care."

