



THE GREAT CHEVANTNIER

Henry Peter Chevantnier was a romanticist long practiced in the wiles of small trade. He came here, in the early spring of 1890 and enjoyed a fairly prosperous first season. A thin little man, he went about town behind a large wicker basket strapped over his shoulders. In the basket was an odd assortment of pin wheels, jews harps, tin horns, musical tops, pencils and pens; dangling from either side were shoe laces and toy balloons. It was worth a nickel, often a dime, to listen to one of his yarns—not the yarn itself but Henry himself, his speech, his gesticulations; he spoke French with a charming Brooklyn accent.

One morning, E. J. Whitehead was acting as host to the Township Committee in the new Standard office when he spotted Henry in the hallway. "Come in, Chevantnier," said he, "but leave your pack outside. Now, if you will tell these gentlemen the story of your boyhood courtship as well as you have twice told it to me, I'll give you a quarter." Thereupon Henry fought five duels with as many suitors and mortally wounded three; and when he rescued his lady fair from the jaws of a panther in the jungle, she swooned in his arms. "Well done, Chevantnier!" said Mr. Whitehead. "Here is fifty cents." He held the coin suspended between his thumb and forefinger. "It seems to me, Chevantnier, that your lady friend has a good many names. At first it was Louisa, then Anne, and now Josephine. How do you explain that?" Henry's small black eyes danced and his pointed goatee bobbed like a cork on troubled waters. "O, Monsieur Whitehead, I am so surprised!" he exclaimed. "You do not understand Chevantnier. He is a Frenchman through and through. Of course, there were a good many, a very good many, pretty young ladies, Monsieur. And I was a very dashing young fellow!" The half dollar dropped into the eager palm and the Great Chevantnier strutted grandly out of the room.

His stock of goods and stories exhausted,

Chevantnier ran the gauntlet of the village jokers as messenger for the Western Union. He resented being called "Wee Wee" and "Slow Poke" and wrote the president of the company demanding better terms. Editor Peersall published the letter:

"Mr. Tel. President: Dear Sir—My name is H. P. Chevantnier, W.E., Westfield, N. J. I have been in your employ for several months and there has been several complaints about me being too slow. I, therefore, ask you to buy a nice horse and a side bar buggy which I will take home every night and keep in my own stable. In the daytime, I will keep the same in a little shed you will have to build for me along side the new depot. Furthermore, I want you to raise my salary from \$9 to \$25 per month and board. I am willing to board at any one of Westfield's leading hotels. If you comply, I shall continue to work from 7 a. m. to 9 p. m., if not, I shall resign next month. Respectfully, Peter Henry Chevantnier, Messenger in chief, Westfield, N. J." Sad to relate, he resigned, sine die.

Through the misfortune of being bitten by Uncle Al. Drake's mastiff, Chevantnier received \$50. which he invested in a sprinkling cart of his own invention and pushed up and down Broad St. for a fee of 25c per property owner. The thin trickle evaporated as fast as it was applied, and after a few days of exhausting labor, Chevantnier formally "resigned" and went to work for the town as Official Collector of Stray Waste Paper, at \$10. per month. Thus he lived happily for a decade. His "residence" was an old shack in a woodlot on upper North Ave.; his bed (by preference) a bath tub filled with straw. Here he was found dead by a searching party. In his will he left his "entire estate"—the plot of ground he had acquired by squatter's rights—to "my friend, Mr. Chas. Clark." The Town Clerk promptly transferred the lot to Chevantnier's son, who lived in New York.