

PITTSBURGH'S GREAT ROMANCE

RUTH SALISBURY

IN the middle of the nineteenth century Pittsburgh experienced a romance as exciting at that time as the abdication and marriage of Edward VIII was to prove ninety years later. A young girl, daughter of a wealthy landowner, eloped with a man almost four times her own age. The romance of Mary Croghan, fourteen-year-old daughter of William Croghan, with the dashing Captain Schenley was the story of the year in 1842. It set the tongues of gossips wagging in New York and in Pittsburgh.

This fascinating romance unfolds before our eyes in a group of contemporary letters presented to the Darlington Library by Mrs. Margaret S. McHale of Somerset, Ohio. The manuscripts had belonged to Mrs. McHale's brother, John D. Scully. They consist of letters written to William Croghan, father of the runaway bride, just after the elopement. The letters were penned by his friends and representatives and by friends of the main characters involved in the runaway marriage. In them unrolls a true-life romance far stranger than any fiction conceived in the imagination of a twentieth-century novelist.

Mary Croghan was only fourteen when she met the dashing Captain Edward Schenley. Her father had sent her to what he considered an excellent finishing school on Staten Island. The school was run by Mrs. McLeod, a sister-in-law of Captain Schenley. How long in advance of the elopement the couple had made their plans it is difficult to determine from the letters. Two weeks after the event took place General Jesup, assigned to find out the facts of the affair for his friend, wrote Croghan, "I have seen a letter of Mr. Schenley to Mr. Lynch in which he declares that he was engaged to Mary before he went last to Demarara, and that she had informed you of the engagement. The latter declaration I pronounced to be false the moment I heard it. Was I not right?"¹ We do not have Croghan's reply to this query but Jesup must have been right. If William Croghan had known and approved of his daughter's engagement, would he have been stunned and outraged at the news of her elopement?

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¹ Letter M. T. Jesup to William Croghan, New York, February 12, 1842.

A letter from Richmond McLeod, son of the owner of the school, reveals Croghan's displeasure at his daughter's attending the theatre with Schenley :

New Brighton²
January 31st

My dear Mr. Croghan. I write you a *line* only to say that Mary Croghan says she has a letter from you and that you are displeased at her going to the Theatre — It was an accident that she went as M^r Schenley invited Miss Wash Jane & Piner and a short time before going Jane without consulting me gave up her place to Mary. I did not attach much importance to it but think with you she had better not go again.

She says she is to have a new Bonnet & cloak. Her present one appears to me quite good enough for New Brighton but as she seems for some reason or other to wish it & says you do also I must comply.

I intend writing to Emmeline³ but if I have not time will you give her my love and tell her to go soon to Pittsburgh and that I *am sure* she is expected there. I remain
dear Mr. Croghan

Y^{rs} respectfully & sincerely
Richmond M Macleod

In haste

This letter supplies further evidence that William Croghan did not wish his young daughter to associate with Schenley in any way.

The preparations for the wedding trip appear in a letter written by Mary Croghan to her father January 23, 1842, the day after the marriage was performed :

Jan 23.rd 1842

My dear father. I think you have treated me *very very* badly indeed in not writing to me as soon as you arrived in Washington, if Emmeline had not written to M^{rs} Macleod *something* about your being there, I can not say all the things I would have imagined had hap-

² Punctuation and spelling of the originals have been retained to preserve the flavor of the letters.

³ Emmeline McLeod.

pened to you, but *never mind* if I do not receive a letter from you tomorrow or next day *I will write another to you*. M^r Schenley has not yet *ceased* in his *kindnesses* to *me* and all of the other girls; the Saturday after you left I went into the city with M^{rs} Macleod to have my teeth (or tooth) arranged, after we had finished "*he*" came and took us to see Stouts statue of Fanny Elpler (oh it is *too* perfect) and afterwards we went to see the Panorama of Thebes and Jerusalem, that was *quite* enough for *that* day, and last Friday evening he took Fanny Wash, M^{rs} Macleod, Pina and me to the theatre, we staid at the American (tell Emmeline we had the same rooms *exactly*) we saw "London assurance" over again and "What will the world say" O! it was *too too* nice I liked the last the most, as it was *very very amusing* and interesting, we had the same private box that we had the first night — I wrote to Lutie *directly* after she left here and she has not *yet honored me* with an answer, I have been *almost* tempted to try Emmeline and see if *she* has *yet* forgotten or *old* (& young) friends, but *something* always says to me "*not yet, not yet*" so I will wait a "*little*" longer and *perhaps* experience the *esquisite* pleasure of receiving the "*first letter*" from Emmeline G — (not Goose) — I want to get a *cloak* and *bonnet*, *two very necessary articles* for New Brighton, and I thought it would be *better* to *tell* you I want them before I get them, am I not an *excellent good* "*big*" girl *I think so?* Do you intend visiting New York before you go to Pittsburg, from what Emmeline said in her last letter you had not *then* decided — *Good bye* my dear *pa* — If

you do not soon write to your very

affectionate daughter

Mary?

PS. Do you not think I am improving in my writing?

How clearly this letter reveals the charm as well as the youth of Mary Schenley. The "cloak and bonnet" of course were not "very necessary articles" for New Brighton but for Mary's trip to England with her new husband. Too bad her father was not a more frequent letter writer.

Edward Schenley's letters reflect the difference in age between himself and his wife. They reveal him to be not the complete rascal that William Croghan, understandably enough, believed him to be. An undated letter to a friend describes the arrangements he had made for the wedding trip:

My dear Sir,

The very night I supped with you my final arrangements were completed to carry off to England Miss Croghan, to whom I was duly and properly married on the 22.nd Jan. All of course by strategem — and after a long series of most difficult but effectual deceptions practised against my family here. The object of my intruding these matters upon you is to beg the favour of your friendly offices for them under the severe affliction and indignation that they are likely at the first blush to consider it. I have written a good number of letters which it is possible, and I wish you and Captain Bolton may see: for I think that their perusal will convince you that disparity of age is the only thing that are seriously to be advanced as an objection permit me to assure you most solemnly that this and every other circumstance connected with me has been laid before my wife; and that her resolution to marry me at all events has dated from a year back. That I am credibly informed too, she more than once states this resolution to her father, and that our greatest fear was that he would caution my family — in which case the thing could not have been effected. However not to trouble you more than necessary I will merely again solicit your friendly influence amongst any persons who may get hold of a wrong version of the story, or who may prefer abusing them to the really only blamable person.

Your obliged friend.
Edw.^d W H Schenley.

To W. Lynch.

This obviously must have been the letter which General Jesup had seen in which Schenley declared that he was engaged to Mary “before he went last to Demarara.” Schenley writes that Mary’s resolution “to marry me at all events has dated from a year back . . . she more than once states this resolution to her father.” Probably William Croghan believed Mary’s statement of her resolution, if indeed she did make it, to be no more than the passing fancy of an infatuated schoolgirl.

It is interesting, furthermore, to note in this letter from Edward Schenley to his friend Mr. Lynch that Schenley appeared more worried that Croghan might inform Schenley’s family of the possibility of marriage with Mary than he was about any objections Croghan might have. The refusal of Schenley’s family to permit the marriage would

cancel his plans with no question. It would appear that Schenley had little sympathy for William Croghan's feelings at losing his daughter were it not for this gracious letter addressed to Croghan :

New York.

Dear Sir,

Previous to your receiving this letter from the hands of my friend Mr. Henry Delafield, he will have disclosed, verbally, to you the event which has called it forth ; I shall therefore briefly but solemnly assure you that I have used no undue means or arguments to induce your very dear daughter to become my wife — that I have placed every circumstance of my life before her ; and that her resolution to unite herself to me has been of upwards of a year standing ;

Not having experienced the honor of an intimate acquaintance with you ; I must beg to refer you for a further knowledge of my general character and conduct as a son and husband, 1.st to Mrs. Inglis whose daughter was my first wife, and who has known me thru good and evil fortune for nearly 20 years. — 2^{ndly} to Sir William and Lady Pole of Shute House Devonshire, under whose care my only child, their granddaughter resides, and to whose paternal care it is my intention at once to place my Wife. — . . .

As regards

Those who know me in this country, I most freely commit my character ; both publick and private into the hands of my warmest friends ; I may almost say Brothers ; Mr. H. Delafield and the other members of their family. I have held intimate intercourse with them during 13 years a period which must have furnished them with an insight into my habits and disposition —

I am by no means vain enough to suppose that any opinion, however favorable, can at once reconcile you to the disposal of your daughter's affections and hand without your knowledge and sanction ; but it is a duty I owe to myself as well as to you to prove that I am worthy of her and to offer it as the best place in my power for the wounded feelings and temporary bereavement I have occasioned you. —

I refer you to herself for the feelings that have dictated this step on her part ; and on that subject will merely remark that they can have been of no ordinary or sudden nature. Whom induced her to unite

with me in deceiving a Parent to whom She is most filially attached ;
 and
 the family from whose care and kindness she has experienced so much
 benefit and happiness.

In conclusion, my dear Sir, permit me to assure you that my life shall be devoted to cherish, and render her happy. — Should circumstances admit of it, nothing could give us so much pleasure as your immediately joining us in England where I can safely promise you a hearty welcome from the Pole family and every connexion I possess.

I beg to subscribe myself ; with respect and esteem. Dear Sir. —
 Yours very.

Sincerely
 Edward W H Schenley

Schenley was sensible of the wrong he had done to his wife's father. It is doubtful that his declaration of the care and affection that he meant to lavish upon Mary did much to reassure Croghan, but the statement that she would be placed in the charge of Sir William and Lady Pole may have relieved his mind to some extent.

Edward Schenley's letter was forwarded by Henry Delafield who took the trouble to include a personal recommendation for his friend :

New York Feby 2d 1842

W^m Croghan Esqr
 Washington
 Sir

Your surprise on the receipt of the enclosed communication cannot exceed that which I experienced on the receipt of others addressed to me conveying the same information — In fact having been made the organ of communications of these extraordinary and painful occurrences I am greatly at loss how to proceed — To wait upon you in person is impracticable nor could the request have been well considered — Desirous first to relieve your anxiety by every means placed in my power, & then to do what justice I can to a Gentleman who has relied upon me in this particular, I have resolved to enclose a copy of his letter to me, which will put you in possession of every particular, saving such of a personal nature as have come to my knowledge during a long acquaintance with him. — of that Gentleman

I must say that this is the first act of his during a long period that any exception could be taken to — At present I cannot write more on a subject that will so engross your thoughts, and must conclude by proffering the only consolation in my power that had your consent been first obtained I am not aware, nor do I believe there exists any drawback to your daughter's happiness in this connection, — Always saving this occurrence I have reason to know that M^r Schenley is a Gentleman of the strictest integrity, most amiable and generous temper and situated in life and position in society as you will gather from the enclosed — I will with much pleasure give you whatever other information I can when I learn your wishes — I have not yet discovered whither M^r S. sailed in the packet of yesterday or not, but presume he did — For some time past I have not seen him, and am now first apprised of the source

Respectfully I am
Yours &c — &c-
Henry Delafield

With the exception of Henry Delafield's letter of enclosure and recommendation printed above, all the letters so far have pictured the romance of Mary Croghan and Captain Edward Schenley through the eyes of the principals involved. Only William Croghan is characterized through the eyes of others and not by his own pen.

A selection from letters of friends of Schenley and of Croghan show further details omitted from the letters of the main characters. The actual wedding ceremony itself and the arrangements for the flight from America are related to Croghan, at the request of Mrs. Croghan, in a letter from Henry Delafield written from New York on February 8, 1842:

. . . With the letters sent to me by M^r S. was a sealed envelope, marked "Marriage Certificate" to be used as you will perceive by the memorandum endorsed on it — I had concluded to forward that paper unopened until I rec'd the letter from Mrs. Croghan, when on consultation with M^r Hughs I was induced to consider the endorsement simply a memd^m for me, and concluded to open it, as that by possessing myself of the names of the person who married them I could get the information you desired, from the best authority. I accordingly called on Mr. Merritt the magistrate who gave the Certificate. — He stated that the parties called on him on the 22^d Jany. last between

10 & 11 A.M. and that they were accompanied by W^m M. Inglis & John B. LaFarge a lawyer of this City, that their identity was proved by these persons, and also that they were of legal age to marry when he went through with the form prescribed by law in such cases. —

From Mr. Inglis I learn that they sailed for London in the ship *Mediator* on the 1st Inst: he having engaged the whole of the Ladys Cabin for their accommodation, that he accompanied them in the ship as far as Staten Island — He took their passages he states in the names of M^r and Mrs Wynham, which was done of his own accord without the instruction of M^r Schenley.

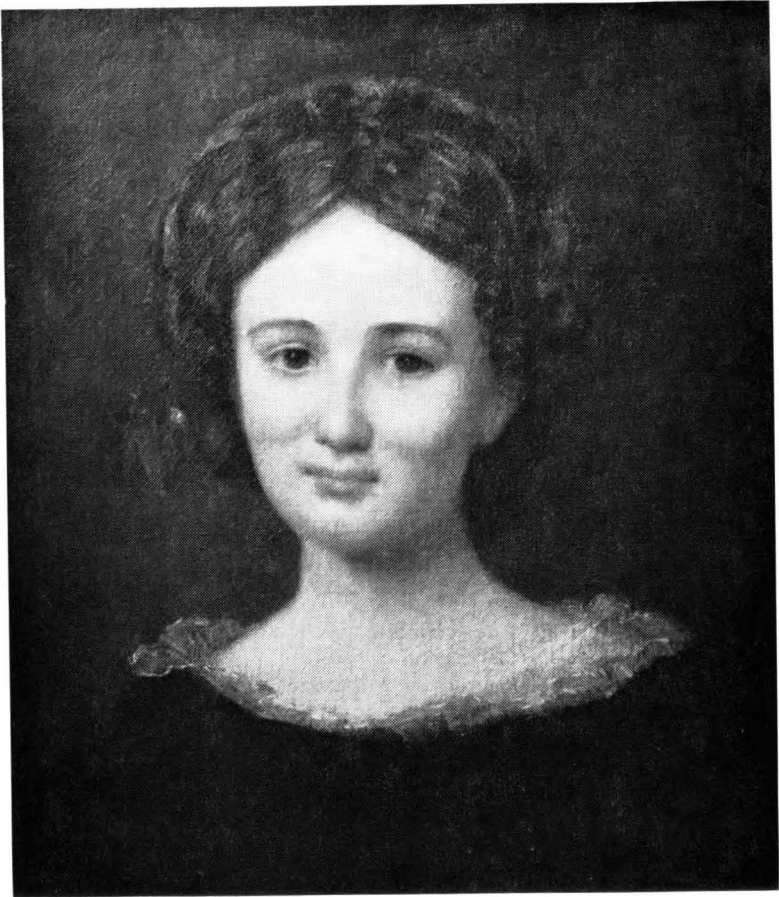
On the 2^d Inst. I went to Staten Island to see M^{rs} Inglis & Macleod to deliver the letters sent to me for them — The arrangements made by the Young Lady were such as to account for her absence on Monday in a very natural way to M^{rs} Inglis & M^{rs} Macleod, they being informed that her Father was in town, with whom she would stay that night &^c — The distress of the Ladies was very great during my interview and I am bound to believe from all that I saw and know that they were ignorant of all that had transpired until they received the letters from me. —

I feel it right to add that in this, like similar cases there are many rumours in circulation prejudicial to M^r S. which there is a disposition to magnify by the wonder loving part of the community — I allude to the rumours concerning his age, habits, & appearance. I can assure you that this is chiefly idle gossip, that Mr- S is not so old as to feel the infirmities of age, although his health & constitution may be impaired by a residence in the West Indies — as to his pecuniary means I can say nothing further of my own knowledge than that his expenditures have been liberal & in accordance with his position in society and that my merchantile House has for a long time been his Banker in this City and have sold his Bill for his Salary drawn on the Foreign office, London which have always been duly honored. — He has never indulged in extravagancies to my knowledge, nor do I believe in his being embarrassed by debt as it is now said by some here. — on the contrary I know of some of his charities and friendly acts that are entirely at variance with these idle stories. —

Believe me Sir with great respect — Yours &c

Henry Delafield

W^m Croghan Esqr
Washington
D.C.



MARY ELIZABETH SCHENLEY nee Croghan
From the original portrait in the Historical Society of Western Pennsylvania

This letter, as did his letter of February 2, attempts to reassure Croghan about the character of his son-in-law.

General Jesup adds to the details about the arrangements. He had not been able to discover how they sailed but he appears to have evidence that bribery was used :

New York 12th Feb. 7 1842.

My dear Sir,

I arrived here late last night, and have to day been constantly occupied in inquiries in relation to the event so distressing to us all. Thus far I have found but little that is satisfactory — If M.^{rs} MacLeod is innocent circumstances are most strongly against her — She brought Mary to the City on the 21st of January, and took her to the theatre — Staid that night at Couzens' Hotel, & as she says, Mary slept in the room with her, & Miss Wash and her daughter in another room — they remained until one o'clock the next day (the 22nd), in the City — The young ladies visited, in company with M^r shenley, some of the places of public report — among the objects of curiosity they saw the El[s[?]]er Statue — during their perambulations M.^{rs} M.^cLeod remained at the Hotel. The Marriage certificate which I have seen is dated the 22.nd of January the identity of both Mary & Schenley was testified to before the police magistrate by a worthless fellow by the name of Lafarge — though Inglis was present, he did not testify to their identity. If they have sailed at all, they have gone under assumed names — no persons under the name of Schenley sailed in the mediator. . . .

I have just left M.^r Delafield — he has exhibited to me his whole correspondence with M.^r Schenley since 1830 — his acquaintance with him commenced in 1828 or 29 — Most of the letters are on business — and some of them are highly creditable to the writer — he showed me a letter of credit from Sir William Pole, authorizing him to advance money to M.^r Schenley — which the latter, he informed me, never availed himself of — he also showed me a letter from Sir William thanking him for his attentions to M.^r Schenley who had been at his house a month or more sick.

I have not yet ascertained where Mary was taken to by Inglis when she came up on the 30th of January — it was not to any of the Hotels on Broadway, unless she passed under an assumed name. M.^{rs} McLeod received a part of her reward in advance — Shenley sent

from Cuba drafts amounting to about two thousand eight hundred dollars the proceeds of what were paid to M.^{rs} Inglis — the old lady expressed surprise at receiving the money and could not imagine what it had been sent for ; but she nevertheless received it — M.^{rs} M. I have no doubt could have explained the whole matter to her had she chosen.

I will write again tomorrow evening.

Y^{rs} truly.

MT Jesup

W.^m Croghan, Esq.
Pittsburgh,
Penn.^a

It would seem, then, that there was a plan and plotting as well.

Seven months later comes the final note from Mary herself. A part of her note is reproduced in facsimile to show its unusual appearance. The entire letter is written with its second part crosswise upon the first. The letter is completely transcribed because we believe it reveals much of the winning charm of Mary Schenley :

[Facsimile of a handwritten letter, written crosswise. The text is difficult to decipher due to the handwriting and orientation.]

My dear Mr. Croghan -
I have just received your letter of the 3rd of September 1852
and I am very glad to hear from you
I am well and hope these few lines
will find you the same
I have not much news to write
at present
I am
Yours truly
Mary Schenley

Paramaribo

3.rd September 1842

My dearest Father : I can no longer be patient ; Seven months have I been away from home ; & have but *one* letter from my dear father ; I have *prayed* to be contented & say "it is all for the best,"— But still no letter ;— oh pray tell me, why will you not write to me ? You may be ill & I not know, you may be well & enjoying yourself & not thinking of coming near me your only and devoted child— If I have done wrong my dear dearest Father forgive, I am wretched for what I have done to you & the *only* manner & my last ray of hope that I have of comforting you and myself, is cut off— By your being persuaded not to come to me ;— If Mother & Uncle Denny tell you what *they* think best, I am confident they will advise your meeting me & my dearest Husband ; oh my father it is for *you* I am *now* thinking ; not for myself— No no not for myself— Oh why do you not come ; you will at once in this climate ; be restored to the enjoyment of your health ; & spirits I *know* ; and oh I assure you what a good child I shall be, (with "God's help") I will you repay all I have done to you— But oh what a climate this would be for you— *Do do* come— We ride every evening I read, practise, and do other things to improve my time but oh if you would come only this winter— Oh why wont you to make yourself well— M.^r Schenley is still what he has always been— a devoted, kind, affectionate & every thing that's good Husband— Oh dear dear if you only knew him— *Please* do write to me & say you will come— I only write to let you know I am well, as happy as I can be without you — & to pray & entreat you to come to me *soon*— Oh do do do write to me & put it in the mail at Pittsburgh "to the care of the Dutch Consul at Boston & I will be sure to get it— Good bye — My dearest Father — Believe me ever your much attached and devoted child

Mary Schenley —

Direct my letters

"M.^r Schenley"

Care of H. B. M. Commissioner

Surinam

Care of the Dutch

Consul, *Boston*

It would be unfair to close this story without confessing that eventually William Croghan did become reconciled to the marriage and did come to see his daughter Mary.