

Kelly's "Rock Of Gibralter"

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"Kelly, Kentucky! Stop here three minutes. Next stop Hopkinsville." A town like a million others. Hay, feed and grain shed and a dinky little station. A small boy, whose pants were patched with flesh, and a dog mooching on the platform. Everyone on the day coach gives Kelly one look and one sigh and pulls in his neck. Just another three-minute stop.

I stepped off the train and eyed critically the town in which I was to spend two months of my summer vacation. There was not much to see but there was a feeling of friendliness and contentment everywhere. It was as if I had stepped into an entirely different world. After a few weeks I began to understand that feeling. It was an opportunity to be your own man, the opportunity to live without being merely a figure on a graph, a street address, a customer to whom articles are delivered.

Bert Hale symbolized this feeling. Sooner or later everyone came to "Bertram B. Hale's General Store and Post Office." It was the meeting place of everyone in Kelly. The store is a typical small town store in which everything can be bought, from penny candy to fencing wire and shoes. Bert also houses and operates the Post Office which occupies one corner of the store. The entire store is warmed by a heating stove which stands in the middle of the room. It is around this stove, winter and summer, that the town of Kelly gathers. Reverend Amos Jensen remark-

ed once that Bert had more of a congregation around his stove than the Reverend had around his pulpit.

Besides running the store and Post Office seven days a week, Bert is the deputy Fire Marshal and chairman of the Town Board. He is a gentle man, with the face of a ripe apple that has been left too long on the tree. A few wrinkles, yes, but still sound to the core and slightly rosy on the surface. He is tall and broad-shouldered. I would judge his age to be about sixty-five. He takes great interest and pride in his town and in the people who live there. He possesses the remarkable talent of remembering everyone's name and personal history.

Bert has a good reputation, both for the quality of his merchandise and for the quality of his life. He has a conscience as clear as good flying weather. During the war, Bert launched a one-man Bond Drive. He sold nearly two thousand dollars worth of bonds. He likes to read the "Tribune" and was annoyed when the "boy power" shortage led to the discontinuance of early-morning deliveries, so he took the job. I dare say he has not lost a whit of his essential dignity despite the bag of papers flung over his shoulder every morning.

I consider myself very lucky to have met and known someone like Bert Hale. To me and Kelly, Kentucky, Bert Hale is an institution as solid as the Rock of Gibralter.