

*A letter written in 1930  
to — Mr & Mrs John Stapleton  
well known Hillier residents.*

### The Passing of a Friend

Mr. J. E. Clark, Wellington.

Dear Brother Clark: I felt pretty badly when I received your letter telling me John Stapleton had passed to the country beyond. I had not expected it. While my old friend was passing on I was up in Detroit and Windsor visiting friends and having a good time, and I felt guilty to think that while I was enjoying myself the grim reaper was busy in Wellington when my attention was centred elsewhere.

I was totally unprepared for such a shock. It seems now as if I was taken at a disadvantage. It seemed unfair to me. Since John returned home from B. C., I had written him every other week, trying to keep him from getting lonesome, and I had planned a good time with him on my vacation this summer. But it was not to be. I'll never see John again in this world. But we will never forget him. The memory of him will always remain with us. We can always look back over the hills of time and see him there on hill 1930, with a wide rimmed straw hat on, and chewing the stem of a white clover blossom, and watching us.

It is also a great comfort to know that his thoughts—the thoughts and wishes of a kind, true friend, will follow us to the end of our earthly days.

I think it was the change of climate that gave him his cold. He came east a month too soon. But he was so anxious to get back to the old friends and familiar places that he could not wait any longer. I knew he could not be happy in the west. I often used to think of him out there, and the more I thought of him the more I was convinced that he could not, at his age, make new friends and be contented to live in a strange land. And his return proved that I was right.

I am glad that his last illness was short. God was good to him. God had been good to him all his life.

John had two peculiarities, as we might call them to-day. He was a man, and strange as it may seem, he was honest; and, believe me, in this age it is a great thing to have found and known an honest man. One could not meet him and know him without being the better for it. In his own estimation, his pledged word was of greater value and a thousand times more binding than any paper that bore his signature. I know whereof I speak.

John never made any pretensions, that I know of, to being a devout Christian; but when I come to shuffle off this mortal coil, if my life is anyway near as true and clear as his was, I shall have no worries about my hopes of heaven.

You know I am glad, in a way, that John has gone on. He's happier now than we can ever hope to be. He's with Lida now and neither one of them have a thing to worry about. They are no doubt wondering why we weep and feel cast down and low in spirits because they have left us for a time.

Lida was a great deal like John in respect to living a Christian life. But one only need to glance at her to see that from her birth the Master had marked her for His own and had been very good to her throughout her life. He gave her a beautiful home, a prince for a husband, a charming daughter, and a much-loved granddaughter, and in the later years of her life he blessed her still further by removing from her all earthly sounds in order that she might spend her time in meditation and in prayer, undisturbed.

John was very fortunate indeed to have such a woman given to him, and he knew it. He had told me so thirty-five years ago, so he couldn't complain any.

I guess Lida might have been a little lonesome over there the past two years, too. She used to get lonesome when John went hunting in the fall. But, on May 24, 1930, when John "came home" there was a greater song of joy in her heart than when the morning stars sang together.

I felt rather badly when you told me about going to see John. I think he was lonesome. I could have held him by the hand anyway until he was over and he would have never known until he was over that he went alone, and it would have made it so much easier for him. I wonder if anybody did hold him by the hand?

He and I were to visit the old home on the edge of Hillier Village this summer where we spent our happiest years, and then we were going up to Pleasant Bay, past George Morrow's old home. The last time we went up there was on a bright Sunday morning with John's pacer, Silvy, and a little open buggy, and we found George out in the yard making love to a brand new threshing engine he had bought and just brought home. George was a big man—a mighty big man, and for his size very light and quick upon his feet. He passed on, too, some years ago, and took his great big heart with him.

Then we went on up to the beach and across and down Cold Creek way home. That was the last drive I had with him. But we had planned a happy trip this summer. I intend now to go over the route with you and it is just possible that we might see John on the way. He will be close to us anyway, because he knew we were going.

I have just now received your last letter and it told me exactly what I had previously surmised. Although he was in the midst of lifelong friends, he was lonesome and homesick for Lida, and nothing you or I or anyone else could do for him would make him happy or contented, and he was glad to go. I am glad, for the sake of both of them, that he is gone where he is happy and contented.

Your last letter consoles me. You, who was his staunch friend went to him in his darkest hour and took him by the hand. May heaven bless you for that kind act.

John was only a humble farmer, lately retired to live in Wellington. He was just an ordinary everyday man, but you no doubt know the old lines in our school books:

*Full many a gem of purest ray serene  
The dark, unfathomed caves of ocean  
bear;*

*Full many a flower is born to blush un-  
seen*

*And waste its sweetness on the desert  
air.*

Yes, I know now that I am glad he's gone, but still I would have liked to have seen him once more.

I have many questions to ask you concerning him when I come over this summer which I hope will be in August. In the meantime I will write you often. Sincerely and fraternally yours, Hugh E. Browne, 452 N. Austin Blvd., Oak Park, Ill.