Francis Strickland

The following story was written by Theron Camp, nephew of Catherine Camp Strickland, who was wife of Francis Strickland.

In Sherburn , England, a maiden lady of wealth founded a boarding school for orphan boys, where they could enter at eight years or less and must leave at fifteen years of age (free of charge to the pupil). The school was in charge of the Rev. James Proctor of the Church of England. He was preacher or rector in that Parish, teacher of the school, and had sole control of the boys. Printed Rules & Regulations for Orphans' care were placed in plain sight in the school rooms; sometimes they were disregarded by both parties.

While Mrs. Charlotte Briggs Strickland was a widow she secured a place for her boys, Francis and Joseph, in that school, though Joseph was rather young and they were but half orphans.

Punishment there was sometimes severe and sometimes unmerited. Rattans or canes were kept in the teacher's desk for use and at times the boys would get them and run them through hot ashes--at other times rub them with onion juice and make them so brittle that the very first blow struck with one would break it in two and the master would get angry, but could not find who did the mischief, and the boys enjoyed the sport. Frank and Joe (as they were called) among the rest, if not leaders.

Among the Rules the caretakers were required to "keep the pupils' shoes blacked." After a time, the older pupils were required to do that work, with the addition of the shoes of the teacher's family. One day when Frank was in his teens as he was blacking shoes, the teacher's daughter, about his age, "complained that her shoes were not well blacked." Frank referred her to the Rules saying, "It is your place to black my shoes instead of my blacking yours."

On leaving school at 15 (in 1845), he helped his step-father Johnson, who took contracts for grading railroads, by keeping books for him and attended to paying the workmen--to do that he often went from one station to another with quarts of gold and silver money (no paper) in bags. Not every boy less than 18 has such an opportunity nor everyone that could do the work if called to.

Two years later, it is recorded that--Stephen Johnson, Jonathan Whiteley, George Briggs and their families, in

1848, set sail from Liverpool, England, for America--they landed in New York City--took the canal to Buffalo where Mr.Whiteley met a brother (who had preceded him some years before) and the whole company spent the night of their arrival, Sept. 1848, at North Evans, Erie Co. N.Y. in the house of Mr. Thomas Whiteley. Soon they found houses to live in and employment for those who wished it.

Once Mrs. Johnson (former Mrs. Charlotte B. Strickland) walked to Buffalo, 15 miles, and back in one day.

While there they used to hold prayer meetings in Mrs. Johnson's house and all sang "with Thee conversing, we forget all time, and toil and care."

Mrs. Johnson always held the family pocket book and procured the family supplies. The following incident which I "recollect" shows her skill in managing "ways and means", also her good judgement which she continued to show through life. For work done by Mr. Johnson and the boys they might take store pay of the Jones brothers, and there was a running account for some weeks, when Mrs. Johnson, needing some money, went to them for a settlement. As she told Mr. Jones, her errand he looked at a book and said, "I think you owe us $2." She told him that "there must be a mistake, for she had not had goods to that amount. Then he said that was what he "found in that book, but my brother keeps the books and he is not here." "I shall not settle till you look it over and find out", and she left the store.

In a few days she went again and Mr. Jones said, "We have looked over the books and find a difference, we owe you $5." "Yes, I think seven dollars is as good for me as it is for you." He paid her the cash. Is it any wonder some of the grandchildren are good accountants?

Soon after his arrival in America, Frank again kept account of the work of all the men that Mr. Johnson employed in making a new road of nearly solid rock, on a side hill at North Evans. This required many men--much time and skill, and he proved a valuable assistant.

After this, he worked by the month for different persons, then bought a team and wagon and spent one winter carrying lumber to Buffalo.

One winter he went to a singing school and learned to read notes. He was a good singer and all the family were also, for that matter. At the close of the school he took his place in the choir to sing bass, in the same choir where Miss C.L. Camp sang, and they sang together, and as years passed on he sang and as long as his strength lasted he sang, as his family well remember.

After a few years, Mr. Johnson and family (leaving Sarah married and Frank unmarried) moved to Conewango, Catt. Co. N.Y. and bought a saw mill. Thomas Strickland took his wife there with him.

In the spring of 1852, Typhoid Fever came to very many houses and three in our house had it. Frank thought he would take his girl away from it, so one pleasant May day they rode to Eden, six miles away and were married, intending to go to his Aunt Ann Whiteley's for a long visit. Everything was ready for a start, but the third morn from their marriage, instead of starting off, Kate could not raise her head from her pillow. She had the dreaded Typhoid fever. She got better so that about the middle of July they went by wagon (no railroad then farther west than Buffalo) taking Kate's little sister, Ellen with them to Conewango, Catt. Co. N.Y., where they commenced housekeeping in a 7 x 9 lean-to of Mr. S. Johnson's house, and Frank worked in their saw mill.

The next year (1853) Mr. Johnson moved to Coldspring, Catt. Co, N.Y. and bought a farm. Thomas lived near them in a small house, where his wife died. Not far away from them, William Langham bought a farm and still lives there (June, 1897). While on that farm, James Johnson died, and was buried in Bunker Hill Cemetery in the 1855.

Frank bought the mill and worked it himself. They had to manage very closely, yet had a clean and happy home.

In March, 1855, the mill burned and they (Frank's family) all went to Evans and helped her father (Theron Camp) build his barn. In the Fall, they moved back to Conewango, and her father went there with his team and drew lumber, and did other team work to build a new mill. Here they lived pleasantly--went to meeting and helped in Sunday School, when there was any, till February 1858; he sold out, bought a farm of ____ acres, with a shingle mill and log house on it into which they moved in Bucktooth, Catt. Co. N.Y.

The next winter they moved to Bay State, a little farther down the river, stayed a few months, then moved back and worked in the shingle mill and cleared on the farm. In November, 1859, Theron was born, and soon the name of the town (Bucktooth) was changed to Salamanca

The sound of war filled the air. They worked on, living as people must in a new country, though having plenty of potatoes and Johnny cake by going 16 miles to Randolph to get corn ground. Frank kept thinking Nellie was born in that log house in Salalmanca on the day of the battle of Shilo, April 6th, 1862.

The defeat of our troops at Bull Run settled thle question of patriotism and duty with Frank, and he enlisted for three years in the 154th Reg. U.S. Volunteers. He arranged business as well as he could, and on the 11th of September, 1862, the day his oldest daughter was 9 years old, he bid goodbye to wife and children, and with the Testament bearing his wife's maiden name, and Daguerreotype case (containing the pictures of his wife and children, and his mother and step-sister, Sarah Langham) in his pocket, started for Jamestown, which he soon left to go to war.

His wife and children went to Evans, Erie Co. N.Y. to stay in a part of her father's house, and he assisted in caring for their needs. Frank wrote home often, and sent money when he could. His wife sent a box weighing 50 lbs (containing horseradish, butter, cookies and mince pies) to him in the winter of 1862. The pies got some mouldly, but he "would eat some, because they came from home".

That winter the children all had the measles, and Theron was very near Death's door with the croup. His mother was in the habit of doctoring the children herself, but this time her skills failed, as she did everything she knew of, and at midnight a doctor was sent for. He came and said all she had done had been good. He gave medicine, watched him awhile, then left. Once I held him, well wrapped in flannel, by the side of a warm fire (so his mother could rest) and cold sweat stood on his forehead, and all over his body. It seemed a though his life was going, but he breathed easier and rested sweetly, and by morning was out of danger.

Soon as they moved there, the mother said to me, "here is work for you," pushing Ida and Theron toward me. "I've done my best, and can't get that girl to learn to read, and Theron is most three years old, and can't sing. I am afraid he never will."

Ida learned to read very soon, but I tried many ways to get Theron to sing--finally concluded to let him alone. One day I sat in a low chair rocking Nellie to sleep, and singing a tune we had just learned. Theron stood behind me holding on the chair, and soon a sweet voice very clearly sang with me, "We wish you all a Happy New Year--We wish you all a Happy New Year;, We wish you all a Happy New Year." That battle won, we found he could sing, and he kept on, does yet I suppose.

It was a long time before he could talk plain. Once after dinner he sat in his high chair holding a pickled cherry carefully in his fingers, looking at it very intently. His mother said, "Theron, what are you doing?" "Trying to get the goose out," he said, as he kept churning with the stem and stone. He loved Johnny cake, which he called "Gonny cake" and chair was "care," but love and patient help wore

that all away and he learned his letters and to read in due time at home.

Frank was in the battle of Chancellorsville, and says a piece of shell took off a piece of his great coat skirt, and cut the bayonet scabbard, and bent his bayonet badly. After the war was over, I heard his comrade, William Cone, tell "that Frank was near a tree and that 'piece of shell' bent a bough so it scratched Frank's face as he was loading his gun, and quick as thought threw up his hand--brushed or rubbed the side of his cheek, and went on loading and firing as fast as possible." Cone said, "I could not help laughing-- I should have laughed if Frank had fell dead."

Cone was wounded in that battle--taken prisoner--lay in his bloody clothes 11 days, with only flour paste to eat, with sugar in, if they wished (they had no salt). then there was an exchange of prisoners and Cone was put in Division hospital and cared for.

Frank found Clone there, Cone wanted Frank to "sing something," and he sang, "Do they miss me at home, do they miss me. It would be an assurance most dear to know that this moment some loved one was saying--I wish he were here." Frank sung the whole song. I have heard him tell the story and laugh heartily at the idea of his making a choice of such a song in such a place, but he said, "It was the first song I thought of."

That was in May. As the weather grew warmer, Frank seemed to run down in strength, coughed some, had poor appetite, and so felt so unable to march. Yet, when the command came he followed on, but very slowly; putting his knapsack , haversack, on a baggage wagon, and was 17 miles behind his Regiment when they commenced firing on July 1st, 1863 at Gettysburg.

The noise of battle caused him to quicken his pace, for he "wanted to be there" and about 2:30 he went in on a "double quick" and fired about one hour, when a minnie ball went through the elbow of his right arm and he fell. He had in his pocket a silk handkerchief, which his wife had but recently sent him by mail, that he tied round his arm above the elbow as best he could, and felt that life was oozing away. As he lay there the rebel next to him took hold of one end of the handkerchief and helped Frank tighten the knot.

He, thinking it his last chance to send any word home gave "that Testament and those pictures" to his comrade, S.D. Woodford, saying "If you ever get home, carry these to my wife." This was when the firing had ceased at 4 P.M. and the Rebs, rejoicing in victory, were taking that Regiment away as prisoners, and Frank knew he was on Rebels ground.

About midnight, Dr. C.C. Rugg, an assistant Surgeon of the 154th Regiment, was out with a lantern looking over the field for the wounded, and he found Frank lying on a blanket on the ground between two Rebs in an old brick kiln. How far that was from where he fell, or how he got to that place, I never learned. Rugg tied his arm so as to stop the bleeding, got an old horse wagon, and putting Frank in, carried him to a church in town and laid him on the floor in one of the pews, where he lay till morning--all day July 2nd, all night and till July 3rd-- more than 48 hours, when he was taken to a brick building in town, which he thought might have been a kind of school house--upstairs into a large room--and laid on a long table before two large windows, where his arm was taken off by Dr. Henry VanAernam of Franklinville, Surgeon of 154th, and a Dr. Wilson, I think, and Dr. Rugg helped in some way.

While they were sawing the bone, about 2/3 of the length of the humerus above the elbow, the attendant who was giving the cloroform said, "he is coming to, shall I give him more?" The surgeon said, "No, He's a gritty dog, I guess he'll stand it." Frank heard that, and knew all that was done after; afterward he said "sawing the bone was the easiest part, did not hurt near as much as tying the arteries and sewing the skin."

When that was done he was laid on a cornmat on the floor in a hall just out of that room, with no shirt on, only his pants. He knew that his clothes and his arm were thrown out of those windows, and he got someone to go bring from that increasing pile of legs, arms, and clothes, his cap and watch, which he brought home.

Where he lay that night memory fails to tell, but he told that the next day, Sunday, he had a "4th of July ride" in an ambulance with others to a hospital tent some four miles out of the city. There he was furnished clean clothes, "hospital shirt and drawers," and was as well cared for as the circumstances would permit.

In the tent there, the Rev. R. Jeffery, pastor of 4th Baptist Church, Philadelphia, a member of tlhe Christian Commission, found Frank and wrote to his wife on the 11th of July, "your husband was wounded at Gettysburg and has lost his right arm." Soon Mr. J. W. Phelps of Great Valley, while looking for his son, found Frank and wrote to his wife so she found where to direct letters.

On the 24th of July Frank was taken to Mulberry St. Hospital, Harrisburg, where he recovered slowly; after a time he wrote home to know whether it was best to go to the Invalid Corps or apply for Discharge - the latter seemed the better way but it took a long time to "get the papers."

While there in hospital, many soldier's friends in the city cared for the suffering - one family named Hommell invited seven one-armed men (Frank was one) to dinner at their house and waited on them well, if the most of them were dressed in "only hospital shirt and drawers." When Frank was buying some things to bring home, Mr. Hommell said, "That boy of yours will need some boots," and he gave him a pair of nice serviceable boots for Theron, the first he ever wore. Mrs. Hummell and her sister gave their photos to Frank - they are still treasured by the family.

The discharge was processed and on the 6th of October, 1863, he met his wife and family at her father's in Evans, Erie Co., NY, but he never saw his mother again for she had moved to Iowa in June 1863. He came home with a bandage on his arm tho the wound was healed - that bandage was removed daily and the stump of the arm soaked in a dish of cold water, then re-bound (a fresh bandage was often used) for many months and some time and patience were necesssary to do it well. The summer of 1864 he went to New York City and was fitted with an artificial arm and hand, but could not wear one and came back without one.

He never had any government Bounty, but his pension, at first $24 per month, was increased several times by law and was paid regularly up to the time of his death.

In the fall of 1863 he with his family visited his home in Salamanca by wagon. In the spring of 1864 he was elected Collector of Taxes in the town of Evans, also the next year, and in the spring of 1866 he and family moved to his farm in Salamanca and he soon built a new house. Here he drove very skillfully a span of Gov. mules, Jackson and Jenny, which he had bought in Buffalo for $110.

He carried on the shingle business for some years, the proceeds of that and his farm, with his pension, provided for hired help and his growing family. In 1873 he served as Assistant Doorkeeper in the assembly chamber at Albany , New York, also in the next year. He was Supt. of the Poor in Cattaraugus Co. for nine years, being re-elected from time to time . When the town of Salamanca was divided the south part was named Red House, and the first Supervisor was "F. Strickland" as he signed his name after the war. He was appointed to take the Census in 1880 and the work was not finished when hemorrhage of the lungs laid him low and his son Theron, not quite 21, was allowed to finish before his father died August 6, 1880.

To continue with the Johnsons--Mr. Johnson sold that farm and went west in June, 1863, taking his wife and son John, Thomas Strickland and two boys, and Charles Strickland. They bought a farm in Bear Grove, Guthrie Co.,Iowa.

There ended his earthly roaming. There Mrs. Johnson enjoyed herself not wishing to come back. She worked hard caring for children and grandchildren--going to meeting when she could--and sometimes Mrs. Johnson and Mother Mitchell were sent for to help in special meetings. She often sent word to friends in York State "not to be discouraged," "kiss all the children for me," etc.

After Frank lost his arm, she says, "tell Frank not to get discouraged, but keep up good heart." In another letter (when she was quite poorly) she said "never expect to see them again, but tell them for me, that should we never meet again on earth, I hope they will try and live so we may meet in Heaven."

As years advanced, the Stricklands all got homes away. Mrs. Johnson was feeble and her husband blind, and John Johnson took a wife who helped him care for his parents the rest of their days.

Mrs. Johnson died Sunday, March 10th, 1889, and was buried at North Branch. She died very easy. When asked how she felt, she said, "as well as I expect to." Those were her last words, and spoken to John's wife, Mattie.

The sermon was preached by Rev. Millhollen, a Free Methodist of Bear Grove. The text was Revelations 14:13. One writing of that death says, "it made my heart ache to see poor old Granpa. I asked him if he wanted to go to the coffin. He said "Yes." I led him there and his hands went all over the glass. I asked him if he wanted the glass took off, but he said, "no, nevermind." I never pitied anyone so in my life. He is alone now and blind. It won't be long before he will go to her."

In January 1876 Charles S. writes--"Father has been sick several weeks. He walked to the Center and back (28 miles) in one day, and of course it was too much for him, but what a constitution and a will he has, almost like iron."

He failed gradually and died, January 7th, 1893.
