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Loving and Forever: George Pickett and LaSalle Corbell

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Loving and Forever: George Pickett and LaSalle Corbell

Abstract
"So listen and cross your heart that you won't tell. I love you—love you—love you, and oh, little one, I want to see you so!" These words, supposedly written by General George E. Pickett to his future wife LaSalle Corbell, sum up the nature of Valentine's Day. They are full of love, even as they were supposedly written in a time of war. In 1913—thirty-eight years after Pickett’s death—LaSalle Pickett published The Heart of A Soldier: As Revealed in the Intimate Letters of General George E. Pickett.

This collection of letters were, according to LaSalle, written by her husband to her during the Civil War. The letters provide detailed information about various campaigns and battles as well as serving as love letters from Pickett to his wife. The collection sold very well, but it eventually became a controversial work. [excerpt]

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“So listen and cross your heart that you won’t tell. I love you—love you—love you, and oh, little one, I want to see you so!” These words, supposedly written by General George E. Pickett to his future wife LaSalle Corbell, sum up the nature of Valentine's Day. They are full of love, even as they were supposedly written in a time of war. In 1913—thirty-eight years after Pickett’s death—LaSalle Pickett published *The Heart of A Soldier: As Revealed in the Intimate Letters of General George E. Pickett*. This collection of letters were, according to LaSalle, written by her husband to her during the Civil War. The letters provide detailed information about various campaigns and battles as well as serving as love letters from Pickett to his wife. The collection sold very well, but it eventually became a controversial work.

George Pickett and LaSalle Corbell met sometime between 1850 and 1860, but their relationship didn’t truly begin until 1861 or 1862. They would marry on September 15, 1863 when LaSalle was twenty (she would later claim she was sixteen) and George was thirty-eight. This was
George’s third and final marriage. It would last until George’s death twelve years later. After her husband’s death, LaSalle would dedicate the rest of her life to preserving her husband’s memory.

Controversy arose in 1968, however, when historian Gary Gallagher made the argument that The Heart of a Soldier was not comprised of letters written by George Pickett. Instead, he argued that it was, in fact, LaSalle Corbell Pickett who either heavily edited or completely wrote the letters. There are several reasons for this argument to be made. The first is that the letters hold far more information than General Pickett could have had at the time of writing. The next is that the tone of the letters did not match with letters known to have been composed by George Pickett.

Why would LaSalle fabricate these letters? Though we can never know for sure, one possible reason is money. George Pickett did not prosper after the Civil War. In fear that he would be accused of war crimes, George and LaSalle fled to Montreal, Canada for several months before returning to Virginia. George would try and fail at many jobs before settling on selling insurance until his death in 1875, leaving LaSalle a poor widow.

Another reason LaSalle might have faked the letters was to preserve her husband’s memory. She would never remarry and instead would fend for herself and her son by working as a clerk in Washington D.C. She would write several books, including Heart of a Soldier, in which she sought to preserve George’s memory as the dashing, romanticized soldier she remembered believed him to be. Whether or not the letters she published were in fact George Pickett’s, it cannot be denied that LaSalle remained, as George allegedly ended his letters, “Loving and forever” devoted to “My Soldier.”

Sources:


