

Sketches of Life on Omaha Toll Bridge

The Missouri river bridge at the foot of Douglas street, which has carried traffic, a wheel and a foot, between the Nebraska and Iowa shores for the last eleven years, has already gathered about it a share of the romantic interest that clings to the waterfront of a large city. Men and women bent on business and pleasure have acted out their comedy and tragedy along its brief length. Crimes have been committed on its lonely roadway and despondent men have

about \$125. The footpads got away down the river in a skiff, but when the tollman came around he went along with the police and traced the thugs for miles. They got away, however, and would have been safe if they had stayed out of town. "About a week afterward Detectives Fahey and Hudson met the men at Twenty-eighth and Cuming streets and caught them after a chase. 'Soper' got ten years, but Brandon went free because the complaining witness

been opening too many bottles down in this hospitable neighborhood made an effort to climb the steps leading up from the water's edge. Half way up there is a high picket barrier and the man tried to climb over this. He fell to the cinders forty feet below and his intoxication couldn't save him. They found him there the next morning. "The next thing was the suicide of a stranger who was never identified. He paid his way at the window and a moment later a switchman saw him climb over the rail and drop into the water. No trace was ever found of him except his hat. Another man who was tired of life made the leap several years ago but changed his mind when he reached the water and swam ashore, although he had loaded his pockets with rocks. "The prettiest dive anybody ever took from the bridge was made by 'Paul Splash' who visited Omaha in 1898 with a circus. A wager was made one Sunday afternoon between Paul's manager and some local sporting men that the young man would not venture to make the leap. A small crowd which had been informed of the proposed feat gathered at the water side and a plank was extended out over the current by Paul's friends. The diver stood poised on the plank for a minute, then tossed away his cigarette and made the finest gaining back dive I ever saw. He leaped straight forward, then turned slowly backward and struck the water with his feet, turning a complete somersault. The slightest miscalculation as to distance might have meant his death. It was a dangerous proceeding at best, as the water was high and full of half-submerged driftwood. The floor of the bridge was seventy feet above the water and the depth in the current was about forty feet."

Unsuspected Responsibilities.

The position of tollman has its responsibilities, as that official receives from vehicles, bicycles and foot passengers over \$100 per day. Before the regime of the present gatekeepers there was suddenly a noticeable falling off in the receipts for which the auditor was unable to account. Detectives were posted at either end of the bridge to count the passengers and it was found that only about half of the receipts were accounted for. The ticket sales were regular, however, and for some time the officials were puzzled. It finally developed that the gatekeepers at either end of the bridge were in collusion with the motorman of a certain bridge car. At frequent intervals during the day one tollman tossed a bundle of tickets to the motorman and he in turn passed them to the other ticket man who sold them over again.

The bridge management feels that the public taste for low fares is a difficult thing to satisfy. "Fifty years ago," said one of the officials, "when there were only two landings on the river, one at the French trader's near Bellevue and the other at Florence, the public was more easily pleased. The Missouri river was the great barrier to the gold-seeker; it was deep and powerful and twice as broad as now when the timber at its source has been made into boards.

"I remember once hearing an emigrant express the greatest pleasure in getting his wagon and team over the river for \$50 and I have no doubt that many paid a greater sum. The only ferry was a rough raft flable to capsize in the rapid current. A few years later a modern improvement was made and a real ferryboat was built to ply between Omaha and the Bluffs. The next step after the building of the Union Pacific bridge was a 'dummy' service for man and

beast. Now passengers have objected to paying 20 cents to get a family and phaeton over the river." The only feature of bridge life which thrusts the inevitable thorn into the tollman's side is the proximity of the smelters. When the wind is in the most unfavorable quarter the smoke from the huge chimneys bearing metallic dust is blown directly across the bridge. This objection is much less noticeable than formerly before the construction of the smoke consumers. The consumers, however, are unable to cope with the arsenic freed in the reduction of various ores. This deadly drug settles over the bridge and the iron work is frequently white with the precipitated powder. It reaches the lungs of whoever pauses on the bridge and

my accompaniment and she did not play it well, but I felt it my duty to compliment her. She cried when I played 'Home, Sweet Home.' I could not see why, as she is at her home."

Stories About Preachers

They were conscientious believers in a creed that promised that on a certain night the Angel Gabriel would appear, trumpet in hand, to wake the dead and put an end to a too wicked world, reports the Cleveland Plain Dealer. They lingered patiently on the housetop in their white ascension robes until a tinge of dawn ruddied the east. Then the eldest among them turned pity-



TOLLMAN HUNTINGTON COLLECTING BRIDGE TOLL.

leaped from the railing into the river underneath.

One of the familiar characters of the bridge, Tollman Huntington, has levied his tribute on the passing throng for years and has witnessed most of the vicissitudes through which the structure has passed. Each day he punches the tickets of about 150 regular patrons who pass to and from their work on the Nebraska side. Many of these are employees of the smelter or the railroad shops who find it more economical and convenient to locate their cottages along the Iowa flats than to live in the Omaha suburbs. These regular passengers secure a 1-cent rate while the ordinary local traffic must pay 5 cents per head.

In addition about as many more foot passengers, rated as "transients," pay the higher fare and these with the thousands who daily cross the river by car, make of the bridge quite a populous thoroughfare. It is also an important avenue of freight, about twenty drays being constantly employed in transporting merchandise along with a great amount of promiscuous travel. One dray which crossed the bridge last week bore seven tons of shot drawn by four heavy draught horses. The usual load, however, ranges from four to six tons.

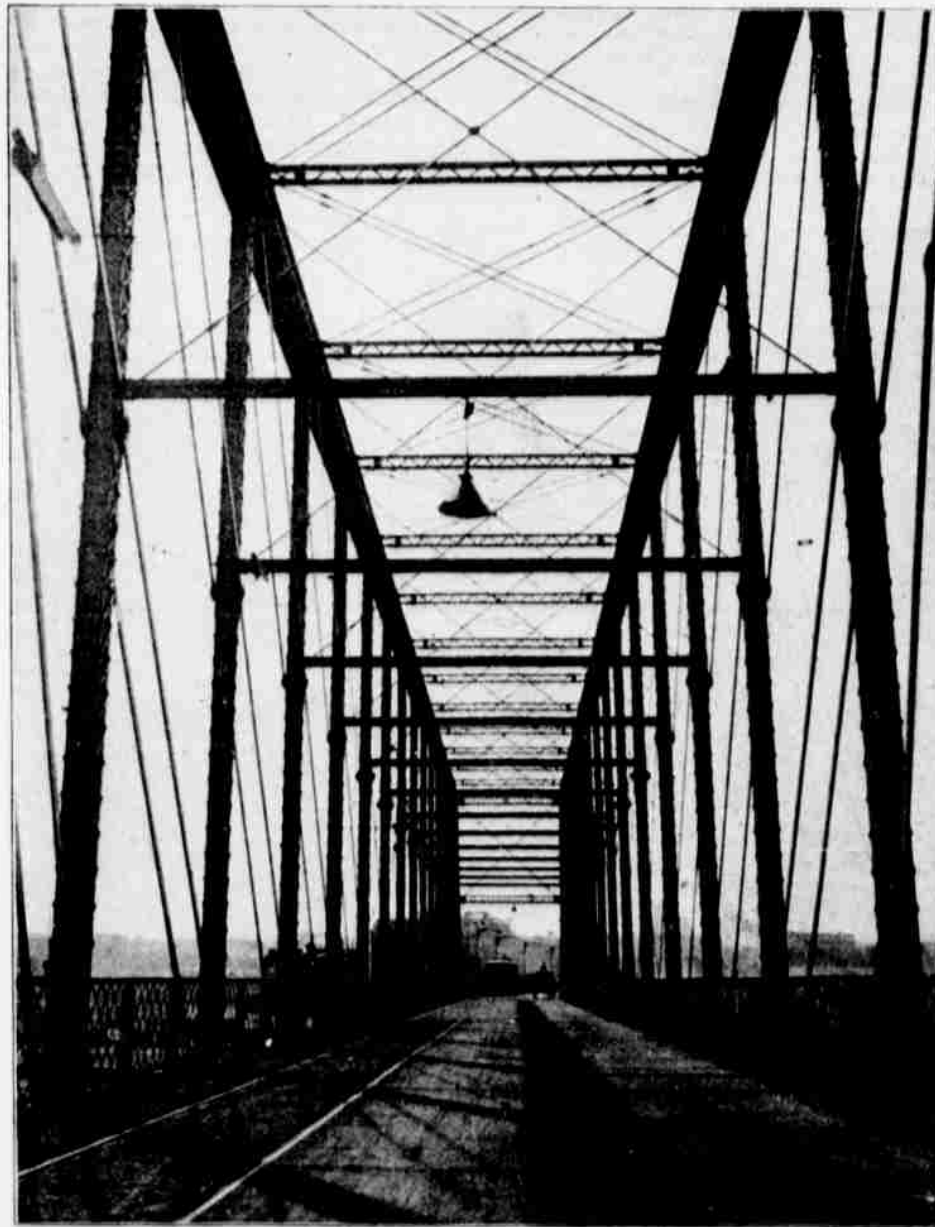
A Reminiscent Tollman.

Tollman Huntington is rich in reminiscences of happenings along the bridge and indeed along the entire Missouri valley. His Nebraska experience was begun fifty years ago when the river boat which brought him to Kaneshville (Council Bluffs) was caught in the ice below the present site of Omaha. "No," remarked Mr. Huntington, as an unpromising introduction of a good story, "nothing very startling ever happens to break the monotony of a bridgetender's life, though of course he ought to keep his eyes open."

"Then it seems to me," returned the inquisitor, hoping to provoke his friend into loquacity, "that the only difference between your term and the man's in the penitentiary is that good behavior lengthens yours while it shortens his."

"Well, sometimes there is a little incident," remarked the bridgekeeper somewhat resentfully. "For instance, the first tollman we ever had met an experience one night that was disastrous for everybody concerned. He died a few months afterward and the fellow who did it was sent up for ten years. That was shortly after the bridge opened when 'Soper' Burns, Dick Grandon and that lot were making a record along the Missouri valley.

"The keeper's wicket that time was at the east end of the bridge and there used to be another ticket-taker stationed at this side. One dark night Burns and Brandon surprised the tollman and hit him on the head with an iron bar. They took away his gun and all the money in the drawer,



VIEW OF OMAHA AND COUNCIL BLUFFS TOLL BRIDGE FROM IOWA SIDE OF THE MISSOURI RIVER—Photo by Louis R. Bostwick.



TOLLMAN HUNTINGTON ON DUTY.

penetrates his skin, leaving it harsh and dry, giving stiffness to the muscles.

Young America Abroad

An 8-year-old lad named Florizel Reuter, who comes from northern Iowa, and is said to be remarkably precocious musically as well as intellectually is studying the violin in London with M. Sauret, reports the New York Tribune. He is a protege of Secretary of the Treasury Gage, to whom he writes occasionally. In a recent letter he put in a plea for the privilege of playing in public in these words:

"I have met some great people at Mr. Sauret's, he invites us often. I met Moritz Moskowski one evening. I am very well, even if there are fogs. We saw the Lord's Mayor's show, November 9, and we saw Kensington Palace and the room where the queen was born and her toys, etc. I do not approve of queens, I like presidents better, and secretaries of the treasury best of all. But, one thing I wish I understood, and that worries me. I know I can't play much, but I am not big, very, and when I am made to play for anybody, I know I hear them say it is worth something and that I could earn money, and get the things I want and need, besides pay what I owe my dear friends, and they say 'Wonderful!' and then I feel good, and then they add, 'You won't let him play in public, will you?' and then I feel bad. I want to earn the money; I am strong and well and a man has to work, why not a boy, too, and I can't have what I want unless I do.

"I want to study harmony and German and French and drawing, and I want to go to concerts and play and I want to help my folks and give things to my friends and help the poor, and I want to travel all over Scotland, and oh, the books I do want and I can't have any of these things because nobody will let me work and I will have to grow up poor and ignorant, when I could work and earn money and study, too. That is what discourages me and I do want it all. I hope you will understand and not think I am naughty or complaining, will you? The sun hardly ever shines here, and we do not have steam or hot bathrooms or street cars or elevated trains and you just have to ride in dirty busses, where people spit on the floor and make you feel sick. Mr. Sauret had me play for Mr. Vert and he gave us tickets to hear Sarasate next Thursday. I'm glad to go, but I do not like to take tickets. I have hopes of Mr. Vert. He wants to see mamma about letting me play and perhaps will let me. I will tell you next time.

"Yes, Mr. Choate asked us to his house. I played and amused them to even up the honor, do you understand? They were very nice. I think I could love Mr. Choate if I had a chance and he wanted me to. He talks so nice and knows so much about things that interest me. A countless played

ingly to the latest convert, almost a stranger, and said:

"We deeply regret, brother, that the promised exhibition will not take place until some future date."

"Oh, don't mind me, elder," said the new convert cheerfully. "I'm used to these disappointments—I'm from Cleveland."

When the new minister, a handsome and unmarried man, made his first pastoral call at the Fosdicks', he took little Anna up in his arms and tried to kiss her, relates Harper's Bazar. But the child refused to be kissed; she struggled loose and ran off into the next room, where her mother was putting a few finishing touches on her adornment before going into the parlor to greet the clergyman.

"Mamma," the little girl whispered, "the man in the parlor wanted me to kiss him." "Well," replied mamma, "why didn't you let him? I would if I were you."

Thereupon Anna ran back into the parlor and the minister asked:

"Well, little lady, won't you kiss me now?" "No, I won't," replied Anna promptly, "but mamma says she will."

The members of a Bible class in a New England parish were studying St. Paul's rules for Christian living, set forth in the twelfth chapter of Romans, relates Youth's Companion.

Among the questions asked by the leader of the class was: "What motto should be adopted when strangers are to be entertained?"

The proper answer, of course, and the one given by all the members of the class, with one exception, was: "Given to hospitality."

In the class, however, there was one young person who held a different idea; this was the minister's daughter, who since she was fifteen years old had been the head of his house and the manager of many a difficult meal.

"I don't agree with the others," she said firmly, "I think very often the motto should be: 'Patient in tribulation.'"

Methodist preachers and laymen who attended the recent conference in Washington have gone home, but have left behind them stories which will not appear in the regular report of the proceedings. Perhaps no man at the conference wielded more power and at the same time enlivened the proceedings more by his bright sayings than Bishop W. A. Candler. One day, in advocating a more liberal loosening of the purse strings, he said that several years ago he sent an article to a paper in which he said that "we pray too loud and work too little." The intelligent compositor got in his fine Italian hand, and when the article appeared it read: "We pray too loud and work too little." "I let it go at that," said the bishop. "The fact is, I believe the printer was right, and I never attempted to correct it."