

FLIRTING WITH FATE

A Story of an Exciting Time in the Early History of *The Chief* A Sketch of the Life of M. L. Thomas

[The following incidents are from a sketch of the life of M. L. Thomas, who was one of the first editors of THE CHIEF, and are taken from the "Western Publisher," of Chicago. We regret that we are unable to reproduce the illustrations which accompany the article.—ED.]

Once upon a time in a frontier town of the Territory of Nebraska, a prominent citizen and friend, who later was twice elected to the governorship, called upon M. L. Thomas, now publisher of the Daily and Weekly Vidette, Pond Creek, Okla., and warned him that a gang was organizing with the avowed intention of tearing down his shack and throwing the printing outfit into the street. The information came shortly after nightfall, and preparations were at once made to repel the invaders. It had always been the policy of the editor, upon learning that trouble or an individual was hunting for him, to immediately go in quest of the hunter, and on this occasion standing guard over a print shop, especially as the enemy seemed to be slow in coming, soon got monotonous and he resolved to bring the matter to a speedy conclusion. A gang of about a dozen men was in a neighboring saloon imbibing whiskey and otherwise preparing for the proposed raid, when he suddenly appeared among them with a revolver in each hand and the quiet announcement that he was ready for the shooting to begin. Everything instantly became quiet, so still the dropping of the proverbial pin could have been heard, and for the space of a minute life and death hung by a slender thread. The gamblers and cutthroats who made up the majority of that crowd were not cowards, and they were armed, but they knew that shooting would instantly follow the hostile move. They knew that the man behind the brace of 44's had the reputation of being a dead shot, and that, while there could be no question that he would be wiped out if a conflict ensued, they did not dare to sacrifice any of their valuable lives. A parley took place and the matter was adjusted for the time being, and the "editor" went home to his wife and babies, knowing that those rough men would keep their word and that the print shop would not be molested. He never told the wife of what had taken place, and to this day she does not know how widowhood for her trembled in the balance that night.

In these days if a sheriff or other officer has occasion to go after a bad man he never thinks of going to a printing office to procure help, but in the frontier days it was the invariable custom of the sheriff in that border town of Nebraska Territory to get the editor to accompany him on all dangerous errands, and the "editor" was foolish enough to leave his business such as it was, and go off on long and dangerous rides, by day and by night, and that, too, without pay and hope of reward. The love of adventure seemed to overshadow all other considerations.

Born in Monroe county, Ohio, in 1849, Mr. Thomas moved to the Nebraska frontier when he was but a lad and began life on a ranch. Up to that time he had attended district school an aggregate of twenty-two months, and, like the man who wrote soap testimonials, he has never gone to school since.

It is not the intention here to tell the life of "Mel" Thomas, as he was called on the plains. He talks but little of those early days, but he once facetiously remarked that aside from the half dozen years on the plains and a year and a half on the city council of Pond Creek he had always tried to live the life of a law abiding citizen. A true and faithful history of this man's life during those years on the frontier would make a book that would be very interesting reading. In closing a magazine article on his life the editor in 1898 paid him the following compliment:

"Mr. Thomas belongs to a class of western men who can never be reproduced. The west they know and which was their creator is gone for ever. Strong, self-reliant and invincible, these men built states from the wilds of savagery and conquered circumstances in behalf of civilization. Their reward has never been proportioned to their merits, but while life remains they have the faculty and the courage to compel recognition for their deserts."

Why the fates should decree that a man almost wholly without education and whose border life as a freighter, buffalo hunter, mail carrier, Indian fighter, man hunter and cow puncher was not exactly calculated to fit him for the duties of an editor or to shine in polite society is one of the mysteries that is past finding out. However, in 1876, Mr. Thomas became the editor and proprietor of a weekly newspaper, the only one in a frontier country of the west. Later he drifted into Colorado and took up his abode in a little town, which afterwards became a county seat, and engaged to do the editorial work on the local paper. Those who claimed to be his friends, but who failed to consult his wishes in the matter, had him appointed a justice of the peace, and while serving in that capacity the first lawsuit ever tried in Yuma county, Colorado, was tried before him. It was a suit in which there was not much involved except spite work, every one in the case being related in one way or another to every one else in the suit. About three dozen witnesses were subpoenaed, a lawyer was employed on each side and the case promised to be an interesting one. The lawyer for the prosecution was an old settler, he having lived in the town nearly three months, but the attorney on the other side was a newcomer, having drifted in from Missouri only two days previous. He came to the town in a mild state of intoxication, and when the suit came up for trial he was in the same condition except probably a little more so. The "court" being new to the business, supposed that the lawyers always got drunk when trying a case, and, laboring under this impression, did not hesitate to take a recess every time the lawyers wanted to go out for a drink. In fact, he joined them in their libations frequently, and when the defendant in the case, under the softening influence of tanglefoot, offered to "set 'em up," the court saw no impropriety in it. The court even set 'em up to all hands, telling the dealer in liquors to "put it on the slate." The complainant in the case, not to be outdone, also had a long black bottle filled and placed on the court's desk, close to his right hand. Things ran smoothly after this for as much as an hour, until, following one of the recesses, the attorney for the defense staggered into court with a quart bottle in his coat tail pocket, a cigar in his mouth and without remov-

ing his hat began to harangue the court, stating that the trial had gone far enough that the evidence was all in except a reserve detachment of d—d lies which the prosecution was going to spring at the last moment, and that he would now sum up the matter. The court had a sort of hazy and indistinct idea that he was the proper person to do the summing up, and for a few brief moments there was "a sound of revelry" in the court room. When order had been partially restored the court took another pull at the bottle and proceeded to "hand down" his decision in the case.

After the lapse of so many years the "court" does not remember what his findings were or to whom the decision was given, and it is somewhat doubtful if he knew at the time; but he not only decided the case but also served notice on all concerned that any efforts looking to a new trial or any attempt to appeal from his decision would be taken as a personal affront and a settlement would be demanded at the first opportunity.

Two days after the trial all hands met in town, the litigants went together and paid the bills at the saloons the witnesses made no charge for their services, the loser of the case assured the court that his findings were just and impartial and his decision right, all the contending families became good friends and thus happily ended the first lawsuit tried in what is now Yuma county, Colorado, and which was probably the most hilarious litigation ever known, even on the frontier.

The lack of education must necessarily be a serious drawback in any business, and especially in the newspaper business, hence Mr. Thomas undoubtedly possessed more than the average amount of natural ability in the newspaper line, for he has invariably made a success of his ventures. He has filled every position in a newspaper office, and at one time was the successful manager of a daily paper in a city of six thousand people. He has accumulated enough of this world's goods to enable him to live the balance of his days without work if he desired to do so. He has been for nearly eight years postmaster of the city in which he lives, and is the editor and owner of one of the best equipped and best paying country newspapers in the territory, the Grant County Vidette, published in Pond Creek, the county seat of Grant county, Oklahoma.

"Slaughter of the Innocents."

Rojstvensky's defeat by Togo was trifling when compared to the walloping received by the Red Cloud base ball team which went to Blue Hill last Sunday. The first two innings of the game were played without either side scoring. Red Cloud failed to score in its half of the third, but when Blue Hill came to bat the fireworks began. The way the Blue Hill "Yellowjackets" swatted the ball was something fierce, and they chased each other around the bases like Al Ault's hounds after a jackrabbit. When Red Cloud's "whirlwind of the slab" finally succeeded in retreating the side Blue Hill had seven runs to her credit. They added two more in the fourth, six in the fifth, two in the sixth, and enough more in the remaining innings to bring the total up to 25. On the other hand, the Red Cloud boys seemed utterly unable to connect with the ball, hits being few and far between. But two men succeeded in making the circuit of the bases for Red Cloud, and when the game ended the score was 25 to 2 in favor of Blue Hill. However, we are willing to bet a week's salary that Blue Hill cannot repeat the dose on the Red Cloud grounds, and we hope to see a game arranged for some date in the near future. Fred Hopka umpired the game and, if anything, gave Red Cloud the best of it, but the boys were "off" from first to last, and got a drubbing which they will long remember.

The New Superintendent.

(At the meeting of the school board Tuesday evening, Prof. G. W. Dudley, of DeWitt, Neb., was elected superintendent of the Red Cloud schools to succeed Mrs. Eva J. Case, who goes to the Kearney Normal as preceptress. Prof. Dudley is about 32 years of age, married, and a graduate of the Nebraska University, class of 1902. He worked his way through college, standing high in his studies, and since graduating has been principal of the DeWitt schools, having been elected to the position four times. There were about ten candidates for the position, and it took over a hundred ballots by the board to make a selection. THE CHIEF welcomes Prof. Dudley and his wife to Red Cloud.

SHOES

FOR MEN AND BOYS

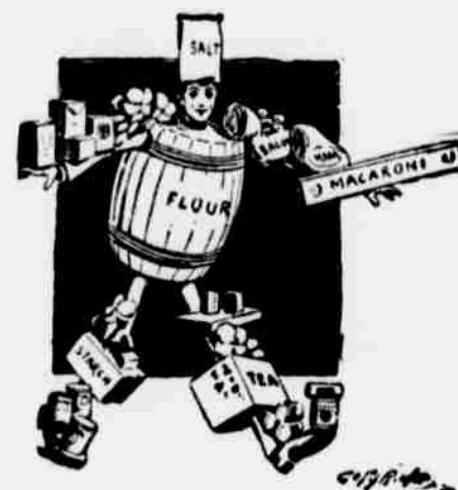
No line in my store has received more attention than my SHOE STOCK. It is kept full of "up-to-the-minute" styles and is composed of the very best goods bought of the manufacturers at cash prices.



I have the agency for the Harlan Shoe, the Peters Shoe Co.'s line, the Watson-Plummer line (successors to C. M. Henderson), the manufacturers of the famous "Red School House" Shoes.

I believe I can save you money on Shoes and give you more GOOD SHOES to select from than any other store in Red Cloud.

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First Quality Goods
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Consign Your Live Stock To CLAY, ROBINSON & CO. STOCK YARDS, KANSAS CITY, MO.

We also have our own houses at
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SOUTH ST. JOSEPH DENVER
Read our market letter in this paper. Write us for any special information desired.

Deaths and Funerals.

Mrs. Martha A. Hurd.

Mrs. Martha Hurd, widow of the late William Hurd, of Cowles, died last Friday, June 2nd, at the home of her daughter, Mrs. A. A. Boren, in this city, at the age of 73 years 5 months and 24 days. Funeral services were conducted at the Boren home Sunday morning, Rev. Hutchins, pastor of the Cowles M. E. church, officiating, and her remains were laid to rest beside those of her husband in the Cowles cemetery.

Martha A. Andrus was born at Toronto, Canada, Dec. 8th, 1831. She was married in Toronto March 5th, 1857, to William Hurd, who died a year ago last January. The family moved to Iowa in 1865, where they resided for twenty years, coming to Webster county and settling near Cowles in 1885. Mrs. Hurd was the mother of six children, five of whom survive her, as follows: Mrs. L. L. Boren and Mrs. A. A. Boren of Red Cloud, William, Fred, and Ruel Hurd, all of the Cowles neighborhood. Mrs. Hurd was a lifelong Christian, having united with the M. E. church when she was seventeen years of age.

Mrs. M. C. Andrus.

Mrs. Mary Andrus, wife of H. C. Andrus of Garfield township, died Wednesday morning and was buried Thursday. Funeral services were held at the home yesterday morning at 11 o'clock, conducted by Rev. G. W. Hummel. Mrs. Andrus was about 73 years

of age, and was one of the pioneer women of the county, coming here in 1873. Further particulars will be given next week.

Mrs. Kaley's Funeral.

The funeral of Mrs. A. H. Kaley was held last Sunday afternoon from the family residence. The attendance was probably the largest ever seen at a funeral in this city. The floral tributes were profuse. Rev. G. H. Rice of the Congregational church conducted the services.

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Mystic Cure for Rheumatism and Neuralgia radically cures in 1 to 3 days. Its action upon the system is remarkable and mysterious. It removes at once the cause and the disease immediately disappears. The first dose greatly benefits. 75 cents and \$1.00. Sold by H. E. Grace Druggist, Red Cloud.

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If you choose, see me FIRST or LAST, and I think we can deal.

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RED CLOUD, - - NEBRASKA

Please Your Hair

Don't have a falling out with your hair. It might leave you! Then what? Better please it by giving it a good hair-food—Ayer's Hair Vigor. The hair stops coming out, becomes soft and smooth, and all the deep, rich color of youth comes back to gray hair.

"I was troubled greatly with dandruff until I used Ayer's Hair Vigor. It completely cured the dandruff and also stopped my hair from falling out. It serves me very nicely also in arranging my hair in any style I wish."—Miss MARGIE COOK, DIXIE, W. Va.

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