

OUR STORY TELLER



HIS MOTHER'S LETTER

It was the beginning of the end. The last tie of the mighty Union Pacific was the first tie in the march of civilization into the great west.

With the thunder of iron wheels and the reverberant screech of the whistle, the Indian, the buffalo, the desperado fled, the overland coach became a memory, the cowboy changed his buckskins for New York shoddy, Mormonism received its death blow. Later, as the giant Pacific system stretched out its arms to the north and south and absorbed the alkali bottoms of Wyoming, the sage brush plains of Idaho, the pine forests of Oregon, even the lava beds of northern California, the pioneers of '49 and the miners of '63 became a curiosity and the men who had subdued the wilderness from the back of an untamed mustang, were styled "mossbacks" by the "tourist coach" emigrants and relegated to the back-ground.

Typical of the Brobdingnagian strides of this new order of things, 30 rotting skeletons cumber a ramshackle run of sheds on the suburbs of Boise. Sun and wind, rain and snow find their way down and through the neglected roof upon their bodies, and as year after



year goes by they answer to the axe and the elements, and fall away into dust and oblivion.

Yet they deserve a better fate. On their weather-beaten forms are the marks of rifle bullets, within their projecting sides came the best blood of the East to find new homes and extend the empire of the great republic.

These thirty leather-springed, steel-ribbed overland stages were for years the one connecting link between the hardy miners and pioneers of southern Idaho and "home." Their very sight recalls Indian fights, highway robberies and dare-devil flights. In them lives the essence of the fast dying "wild west." Their day is past; their past is but a tale; their present is forgotten.

I asked Owyhee Joe about them once. Owyhee Joe had been a famous driver. Wild stories are told of his daring trips up from Winnemucca or out from Boise with a coach well loaded with gold dust, prospectors and government mail. Like Ben Halliday and Yuba Bill his achievements live in the memory and on the tongues of the oldest inhabitants and grow in luster as the years pass.

It was a hot, sultry afternoon. I had sent in "copy" for the outside page of the Statesman and felt free to lounge back in my chair and listen to Joe's stirring if at times mendacious account of an Indian fight he had been in near Kuna, when unabled he had driven off Ben Baunucks and saved the gold bricks of the boxes of Wells, Fargo & Co.'s express. I smiled patronizingly when he had concluded, "And how about the time when you were relieved of your bags without even an 'if you please'?" A shade of annoyance and chagrin passed over his bronzed face and he shifted uneasily in his chair. The click-click-click of a job press in the adjoining room sounded a running commentary on our thoughts while from the opposite corner the splash-splash-splash of an irritating wheel seemed to be rehearsing its version of the incident that so weighed on the driver's mind. The sun beat down on the tin roof and adobe walls of the old office with a fierce, white intensity that awakened the man from his ruminations.

"It was a hotter day nor this out there on the mesa when that young chap stepped out from behind a little dump of grease-wood and as'd me per-berc enuf ter throw up my hands. No arguement in the face of that thar shootin' iron, Mister Editor. He took ever 4.000 clean dust and made for Salt Lake on the back of my best rider. Ever hear tell how we caught him? He? Well, ye see I took my wheel-buss and made for Boise. Found Bill McConnell, Governor and senator since, the name, Col. Robbins, Jim Agnew, or Hank Fisher. We made a bee line

to his room to head him off. There we

bosses three times. We struck his trail, found whar his boss had broke down an' he'd stolen another. That stolen boss meant a necktie party. Sabe?

"In twenty-four hours we came in sight of him. Boss played out. Gush up. Notlin' but sand and sage brush fur miles except one lone tree. Kinder placed thar by Providence, McConnell said. Thar that young feller set—one leg over the horn of his saddle. Fine looker. Stood six in his stockin's. I knew him the minute I set eyes on him. He knew me but never twigged. Bill McConnell war ahead an' he opened the meetin' without shinin'.

"'Good mornin', stranger.'

"'Good mornin'.'

"'Seen anything of a man about your size straddle of a sorrel mare lookin' a heap like the one you ride?'

"'No, I haven't.'

"'That's a purty good mare o' yours.'

"'Yes, she was worth a cool \$500, but she's a little winded now; say, mister, I'll give you \$500 clear for that one o' yours and stop the deal.' He was makin' a good bluff, Mister Editor. Boss stealin' in them days war death on the spot. He knew we war on to him. His offer would well pay for the broken down boss an' he war a bankin' that his money would pull him through. But yer see he didn't know McConnell. Mac had been cap'n of the Vigilants back in '83 up in the Basin and had a name ter keep white. He just smiled at the man's innocence. That's a straight blind o' yours, pard, an' it stands us to come in, but we're thar an' hold you over. You look a leetle might played out as well as yer mare. If you'll jest get down and line our little party I'll stretch yer legs and maybe ye need stretchin' all over.'

"'He got a little white under the gills, but slid down without a word. We followed suit, and Agnew threw over his head a noose, an' passin' the other end over a limb of that old lone tree, nodded that things war ready.

"That young feller war game ter the last. Never moved a muscle. Seemed kinder like a d-d dame. McConnell went up to him and said:

"'Now, pard, is everything all right? Does it fit your neck accordin' to Hoyle?'

"'All right.'

"'Have ye anything to say why this er' little picnic shouldn't proceed?'

"'Nothin'.'

"'Have ye got any word ter leave to yer friends? If ye have make it short, fur we're goin' to break camp inside er' ten minutes.'

"That young feller took his eyes off a bit of sage brush for the first time and looked us straight in the eyes. His eyes war blue. I took notice of that an' his face war clean and kind of pure lookin'. He didn't seem to be takin' much interest in what war goin' on o' round him. Kinder had a far away, talkin'-ter-the-angels look. Made me feel as though I didn't count no how. Kept thinkin' of some things I learnt in Sunday school in Missouri when I war n't bigger nor that basket o' papers. Then he came to and drawin' a crumpled letter from his pocket spoke, with a kinder tremble in his voice.

"'Perhaps you are a better scholar nor I be. If you'll jest read that an' be kind enuf to answer it, I'll tell yer what ter say.'

"McConnell had already passed the coil of rope to Jim Agnew and he had drawn it taut. He took the letter an' as we hung around kinder curious like, he opened it an' read out loud:

"'Etowah, Ga., Jan. 18, 1894.

"'My dear son, James, for long weary months I have waited for news from you since your last dear letter to your old mother. God bless you James, and answer my prayers that this letter may reach you, thanking you for your ever thoughtful care of me in my old age. But once more to look into your dear face and feel that my baby boy war near me possess all the gold in Idaho. When are you coming home? You promised me that in the spring you would come back to me. May the good God watch over and prosper you and return my dear boy to my old arms before I die. From your loving

"'MOTHER.'

Joe paused and looked vacantly up at the ceiling. His eyes followed the drunken gyrations of a yellow wasp. The heavy rumble of the great cylinder warned me that the outside pages were going to press and that more copy would soon be needed. Still I waited in silence.

"That letter did the business.

"McConnell had had a good education back in Michigan and be commended in a strong, clear voice, but a force the closing words war out, it war all we could do ter hear his voice. Yes, ah, ah, my eyes got weaker ter a sick

heifer's. Fact! The rope slackened until it fell from the hands of Jim Agnew, and as the breath of the mornin' came a'rushin' through the leaves of that d-d old tree, and long shafts of sunlight kinder prospected down through the opening boughs; somehow my old throat caved in like an' I went ter thinkin' o' long sunny days on the banks of the Missouri, of my old dog, an' uv a little sister with eyes jest like this young fellar's, an' of my old mammy an' how she taught me to pray. Couldn't help it, Mister Editor, but borrowin' a boss an' robbin' a stage didn't seem a big enough thing to string that boy up fur, an' break his old mother's heart. Guess McConnell war thinkin' o' the same way fur he kind of reverently like folded up that soiled bit of paper and handed it to its owner, an' without a word slipped the noose from his neck, an' then in tones as gentle as a mother's asked:

"'War ye goin' home, stranger?'

"'Yes.'

"'Good-bye!'

"The boy didn't dare trust his voice in thanks. I knew how he felt, but he drew from his belt a small bag of 20s an' offered it to Mac.

"'Hoss!'

"'No, take her an'—good-bye.'

"'He mounted the mare, while we sot an' watched him out o' sight, an' then like a pack o' starved coyotes, turned and silently sneaked fur Boise.

"'Court war adjourned, verdict sot aside,' he concluded, while I leaned

back, my mind filled with the dramatic rehearsal.

"Well, so long, old man, I'm off," and the rough old Jehu shuffled out of the room all unmindful of either the moral or the artistic points of his story.—The Californian.



THAT LETTER DID THE BUSINESS.

The Central Park Monkeys.

"There are twelve varieties of monkeys in Central Park—thirty-two monkeys altogether," said Keeper Cook.

"My favorite is a Nubian baboon. He always tries to help me sweep his cage in the mornings, and fights to get the broom away from me. I give him a rap over the head and then he pretends that he's angry. But it's only a bluff. He wouldn't hurt anybody. He knows I keep apples in my pocket and he knows which pocket they are in, too, and gets them when he can. There is a Java monkey who used to ring doorbells and had to be sent here because his owner's neighbors complained of him so much. Nobody could stop him. He lived somewhere downtown, and no matter how they tied him up he would break away and ring bells. He can't ring any bells now, but he is never quiet.

"Monkey's don't live long in captivity. They all die of lung trouble sooner or later. We have one that has been here nine years, but that is an extraordinarily long time. We have only had one monkey born here that lived. That was about four years ago, and he lived two years."—New York Evening Sun.

Temperature of the Feet.

Few persons realize how much the condition of the feet affects our general health. The Journal of Hygiene gives some excellent suggestions on how to keep the feet warm:

Congestion of the head, throat, or any of the organs of the chest and abdomen is relieved by a good circulation in the feet and legs. Being far from the vital apparatus, and thus liable to become cold, they are, in addition, kept in the coldest part of the room. During the cold season the air at the floor is several degrees colder than that at the ceiling. The anxious mother shows her familiarity with this fact when she says: "Children, you must not lie on the floor; you will catch cold."

Notwithstanding the marked difference, the feet have less clothing than the body. Our chests would suffer on a cold day if they had but a single thickness of cotton and one of moreoco. Warmth of the lower extremities is indispensable to health of the head and chest. Cold bathing, friction, stamping and other exercise; will generally secure the needed temperature in these parts. But in many, whose vitality is low, and whose occupation compels long sitting, the feet, even with the measures suggested, will become cold. To such I advise the use of artificial means. A jug filled with warm water, and placed under a stool which is stuffed and carpeted, will diffuse a gentle heat about the feet, and secure a temperature equal to that about the head.

Other Way Around.

It is told in a recent book of law anecdotes that a member of the Boston bar, meeting one day Judge Lord, an able and conscientious judge, said to him:

"I see, Judge, that the Supreme Court has overruled you in the case of— vs. —, but you need feel no concern about your reputation."

"No," answered the Judge, "I don't; I'm only concerned about the reputation of the Supreme Court."

Bark for Fuel.

Bark is a favorite fuel in the northwest. The evergreens of the region consume quickly in the open fireplace and leave nothing but light ashes, but the bark of these same trees, very thick and heavy, burns more slowly and falls into embers that give out a satisfying heat for many hours.



THE WOMAN'S WIT

CHAPTER VI.—(Continued.)

His voice—the clinging grasp of his hand that evening—had broken open the floodgates of her consciousness, and with mingled shame and fear, Nora saw that she loved this grave, self-contained man, with all the force of her young, warm nature. It was suddenly revealed to her how heavenly it would be to know that he loved her, to hear him call her by her name, to feel that she could make him happy, and give him tenderness and sympathy such as his rugged life had never known. But, oh! would he thank her for it? Was it not shameful of her to think thus—to long to offer her heart to a man who had never sought it, who had never shown her any lover-like attention, who simply liked to talk with her, probably because she liked to listen? And even that evening, there was nothing worth thinking twice about in his words or hand pressure, only a friendly acknowledgment of her anxiety—perhaps too boldly expressed! How contemptibly weak and ill regulated she was, to allow the idea of a man who probably did not care for her, to take possession of her imagination! How was it she had come to love him so dearly? and she did love him! The distress of her conviction seemed to confer a sudden maturity of womanliness on her girlish nature. What sorrow was she storing up for herself, to let any man possess such mastery over her? How was she to retain her self-respect? Only by a steady, consistent effort to stamp out the fire that had been smoldering unperceived in her heart, till the flames began to make their painful burning felt; only by assuming a tone of calmest friendship to the man she loved and dreaded, for he did not care for her, it was not likely. He needed an older, riper, more highly educated companion than herself! She must be careful to guard her secret—albeit demonstrative, or Mrs. Ruthven would not have hinted at any understanding between herself and Winton! Oh! the shame of being suspected of loving one who did not love her would be insupportable. Cost what it would, she would so guide herself as to escape such humiliation!

She braced up her long hair, prayed fervently for strength and help, and, with tear-bedewed lashes, fell asleep. Winton's last words echoed sweetly in her ears, despite her stern resolution.

In London, though Mrs. Ruthven neglected to write to her friends at Brookdale, she was by no means idle.

On her arrival at the hotel where she usually put up, she was astonished, and slightly indignant, to find no Shirley awaiting her; nor were those feelings lessened by the receipt of a note late in the evening, informing her that he had called on the detective, whose address he had succeeded in procuring and now inclosed, but the man was away from home, and his wife was not sure when he would return. "I am exceedingly sorry not to see for myself how you have borne your journey," he added, "but a telegram from my sister this afternoon obliges me to start for Ostend to-night. I hope to return speedily, and to be of any use you like to put me to."

Mrs. Ruthven crushed up the note, and thought profoundly for a few minutes, with knitted brows and a look of pain; then she smoothed out the paper, and, having copied the address in her tablets, tore Shirley's massive to pieces, and threw them into the fire.

It was altogether a miserable evening; Marsden promised to look in, if there was time after an interview with the police officials charged with the care of the Austrian embassy; but the hours wore on, and he did not come. Mrs. Ruthven was still unlighted, and unwell from the result of grief, but she was gathering strength and composure. In truth, her nervous system was by no means weak; nor did trifles, whether of fact or fancy, produce much effect upon her; still she was glad to ring for her maid, and retire to rest, with a reading-lamp beside her, and a French novel of the strongest description in her hand.

But her own doubts, hopes, fears, were of deeper interest. She did not put implicit faith in Shirley's assertions; faith was not either her strength or her weakness; after a careful examination of her position on all sides, she made up her mind to inquire personally into the whereabouts of the man she wished to employ. She stretched out her hand for her tablets, which lay on the little table by her bed, and read over the address: "Mr. John Waite, 11 Maryland Villas, Camden Road, N. W." Where was Camden Road? A map would soon tell. She would drive there to-morrow morning.

Mrs. Ruthven had none of the helplessness of a genuine fine lady; no shrinking from unaccustomed roughness, if it suited her purpose to encounter it.

Nor had she any fear of what her servants might say or think. To her they were merely machines, more or less well constructed to do her service, and to be kept in working order they must be properly oiled, i. e., fed and lodged; of their independent existence she never thought. Yes; she would endeavor to ascertain all about this man herself; she wished Shirley had not gone away so quickly. He lots, which lay on the little table by her bed, and read over the address: "Mr. John Waite, 11 Maryland Villas, Camden Road, N. W." Where was Camden Road? A map would soon tell. She would drive there to-morrow morning.

Mrs. Ruthven then gave a brief, but clear, account of the circumstances under which the robbery was effected. Waite listened with downcast eyes and immovable attention, but did not break silence until she had ceased to speak.

"It is a curious case, very," he then said. "There seems no clew whatever; but you," raising his eyes and letting them rest on hers in a peculiar, impressive way, "you have a suspicion?"

"How do you know?"

"I think you have. I hear it in your voice. Now, will you please tell me, have you any notion of the value of your rubies as known outside your immediate friends?"

"I should think not. I really do not know except that when in Paris last spring, having occasion to send my necklace to a jeweler's, a large offer was made for it by a man who was collecting rubies for some millionaire."

"Do you remember the name of the jeweler?"

"Yes; Serger et Muppert, Rue de la Paix."

Waite wrote it down.

"Have you ever mentioned this before? Your maid, for instance—or any one else?"

"I cannot now remember."

"Have you any idea what time elapsed between Mr. Marsden's departure and the appearance of the robber?"

"Not very distinctly. I certainly sat quiet for some minutes, for I was tired; then I thought I would see if my hair was disturbed by the dancing, and I got up to look in the glass—perhaps it was ten minutes. In fact, I cannot tell."

"Mr. Marsden was the first to find you unconscious? Who came in with him?"

"Some ladies, relatives of his, and a Mr. Winton, a man in the Civil Service, whom I knew slightly in India."

"Did he know anything of your rubies—of the offer for them?"

"I am almost sure he did not. Besides," smiling, "it would be absurd to suspect such a man—a thorough gentleman."

"Very elegant gentlemen do queer things sometimes under the pressure of necessity. You say Captain Shirley was at the ball; was he among those who came to your assistance?"

"No; I did not see him till the next day."

"He was dancing, I suppose?"

"I really do not know. I have an idea he was smoking a cigarette outside."

Waite sat silent for a moment or two.

"Do you know if your maid had a lover?"

"I do not, indeed!"

"It seems to me that some one within the house must have given information to the robber. How did he know of this? Knowing of it he must have lurked alone, locked the conservatory door to secure a few minutes uninterrupted, and then overpowered you with rare promptness. It is the boldest thing I ever heard of. I suppose even a slight cry might have been heard?"

"I am not sure. The tent was thickly draped, and there was no opening into the house, except the door, which was locked. Had any one been in the conservatory—but then, a wait was going on, and every one was dancing."

"How many doors were there in this conservatory?"

"Two into the house, and two into the grounds, one of which formed the entrance to the tent."

"It might have been some swindler with your maid; generally, the integrity of young women is about in proportion to that of their lovers. At present I can see no light in this mysterious business, unless, indeed, you can give me a leading idea. I should like to see this conservatory. How far is Evesleigh?"

"About four hours—but I would rather no one at Evesleigh knew you were employed in the matter."

"No one need know; there are plenty of ways to see the place without giving a reason. It will not take me more than a day, and I can make a few inquiries at Oldbridge at the same time. This gentleman," touching the cord, "has been called away, you tell me—do you know where he is gone?"

"To Ostend."

"Ostend? Ah! Now, madame, will you so far confide in me as to say what your chief object is, to recover your lost property, to punish the thief, or to get to the bottom of the mystery?"

"I suppose one includes all three. I think I most desire the power to punish."

The detective looked at her again with the peculiar, steady, immovable expression, as before.

"I will do my best. In fact, I shall put my whole experience and powers of observation into my work, for it is no common task you have set me."

"I know it," said Mrs. Ruthven, and paused abruptly, as if she arrested the words which were on her lips. "Must you go to Evesleigh?"

"Yes! I shall know my ground better if I do."

Then she asked his terms. He named a fair remuneration for his time, besides traveling expenses, and all out-goings.

"But should I succeed?" he added, and paused expressively.

"I shall reward you as you will deserve," said Mrs. Ruthven, with emphasis.

"It may be a long and fruitless undertaking, unless, indeed, you can give me some help," returned Waite, looking down and softly tapping the table with his large square-topped fingers.

"If I can, I will most assuredly," she said, in clear, resolute tones, "but I cannot stay longer now; make your inspection of Evesleigh, then come to me, I am visible between nine and eleven. Always send up a note—not your name—and you shall be admitted."

"I thank you, madame. I should like also to see this gentleman," touching the card.

"You shall, Mr. Waite, that I promise," returned Mrs. Ruthven, readily. "Now send for a cab, I must not stay longer."

Mr. Waite dispatched a neat little servant girl for a conveyance, and Mrs. Ruthven returned to her hotel, breaking her journey as before.

(To be continued.)

Franks of Florida Wood-Rats.

The latest narrative of the queer doings of the Florida wood-rat, the best-known of them all, comes from Mrs. C. F. Latham, of Mexico, Florida. Previous to the destruction by fire of the old Oak Lodge, year before last, it was often visited by a pair of very sociable and quite harmless wood-rats, who nested in a palmetto hut near by, and made it their home until some cats came into the family. The wood-rats were big-eyed, handsome creatures without the vicious look of a common rat, with fine, yellowish gray fur, white feet, and white under parts. Inasmuch as they never destroyed anything save a pair of Mrs. Latham's shoe-strings, which they had cut in order to get them out of the eyelet-holes, they were tolerated about the premises, and here are some of the queer things they did:

They carried some watermelon seeds from the lower floor, and hid them upstairs under Mr. Baxter's pillow. In the kitchen they found some cucumber seeds, and of these they took a tablespoonful and deposited them in the pocket of Mr. Baxter's vest, which hung up-stairs on a nail. In one night they took eighty-five pieces of wood from a box of beehive fixtures, and laid them in a corn-bush. The following night they took about two quarts of corn and oats, and put it into the box from which the beehive fixtures came. Once Mrs. Latham missed a handful of pecans, and they were so thoroughly hidden that she never found them. About a year later the rats realized that Mrs. Latham had "given it up," and lo! the pecans suddenly appeared one day upon her bed!—St. Nicholas.

"Brought Up in College.

One of the most original characters of the Welsh pulpit was the late Rev. Lewis Powell, Cardiff. While on a visit to Carmarthen town on one occasion he called at the college, and the students were all for the first time to pay him homage.

"Can I have the help of two of you, my boys, for a minute?" asked Mr. Powell.

"Yes, dear Mr. Powell," answered half a dozen of them at the same time.

"Well, I want two lusty boys, if you please," he remarked, and two of the strongest students were chosen. "Now, my boys," said Mr. Powell, "let me lay a hand on the shoulder of each of you, and you put your arms around me."

This was done.

"Lift me, boys," said Mr. Powell, and the students lifted him until he was head and shoulders above all present in the room. "Thank you, my boys," he remarked. "You may let me down now."

This was done. Then one of the boys asked:

"What is the meaning of this, Mr. Powell?"

The answer was:

"Well, some people look down on the church in Cardiff because Mr. Powell, the minister, was not brought up in college. I can go back to Cardiff now and tell them that I was raised in Carmarthen College, and that I stood higher than all the other students."

All truth is nonsense to the man who has let a lie make its home in his heart.