

THE IRON WAY

A TALE OF THE BUILDERS OF THE WEST.



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ILLUSTRATIONS BY A. P. MULLERSON

SYNOPSIS.

The story opens during a trip of the "Overland Mail" through the Rocky mountains. "Dodge" and "Dodge" driver, Alfred Vincent, a young man, and Phineas Cadwallader, introduced. They come across the ruins of a massacre. Later at Anthony's station they find the rebuilding have carried their destructive work there also. Stella Anthony, daughter of Anthony, keeper of station, is introduced. Anthony has been killed. Vincent is assigned his work in unearthing plans of enemies of railroad being built. He returns to Stella, each showing signs of love for the other. Stella hears from her lover, Gideon, and of his phenomenal success. Phineas's letter of importance involving plans of opposition road. Plot to destroy company's ship "Flora" is unmasked and incriminating evidence against Cadwallader found. Phineas Cadwallader faces prison on charge of wire tapping and plot to blow up "Flora." Banquet in railroad town in honor of Vincent. Stella, introduced by a Miss Hamilton, with determination on Stella's part to change her temperance. Alfred writes passionately to Stella, desiring the attention which he was compelled to give Miss Hamilton. Mrs. "Sally" Bernard announces to Gideon makes threat against Alfred's life. Quickly leaves town on best procurable horse in search of Vincent. Stella to heat opposition company's stage a success. Stella falls to hear of Gideon. Stella receives a letter from Gideon. Stella Vincent will die. After conference Stella decides to flee. Years pass. Stella becomes known as Esther Anthony, becomes a rich woman, educated herself at Vassar and steps into highest San Francisco society. Kidnaping changes Alfred greatly and when he and Stella meet, Stella recognizes her. Stella passes him without recognition. Stella's love for Alfred and his for her is revived. However, neither shows recognition of the fact to the other. Stella visits Mrs. Sally Bernard, now in top notch society and wealthy, but she recognizes Mrs. Bernard. Anthony romance is unfolded, showing Gideon, who loved Stella, to be her own cousin. He repeats deeds and tries to even up score in interview with Stella. Alvin Carter, Stella's lover when the Bernard was poor, visits Stella and Sally B. consents to their marriage, despite the fact that several sons of rich hires are asking the girl's hand.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

The Battle on the Desert.

Out in the sage-covered wilds a horde of pigmies charged the ice-bound earth with pick and powder. Fighting desperately against endless malignant obstacles, George Gregory forged on toward Salt Lake, the goal of his dreams.

Side by side, mile after mile, the rival companies ran their grades, the Central Pacific working steadily east, the Union Pacific rushing west from their main front, and pushing east with the grade they had begun at Humboldt Wells. They hoped to outrun their rivals and meet their own iron far west of Salt Lake.

Thus the days sped. Gregory's life became a profane prayer for iron. For ten days his men worked but four hours a day. The rest of the time they slept, visited or tramped. A few quarreled, some gambled on the sly. Yet these men averaged well, and it was not for them that Gregory held his sleepless vigilance, but for the tide of riff-raff setting westward from the oncoming Union Pacific, from the remote mines and camps, and taking toll of mischief as it passed.

One night, worn with fruitless courtship of sleep, Gregory rose and went out into the desert cold, striding noiselessly down the sleeping tented town. He turned the other way, passed the boarding train, the commissary, the shops, and on by the Chinese camps. Returning, a slight noise caught his ear as he neared the wheeled bakery. He stopped, listened, and sent his lantern ray against the door. It was ajar.

Presently a man came out with a loaf of bread and climbed down the steps into Gregory's light. He was a recent comer, thick, sturdy, with beaming brows and fierce, resentful eyes.

"What are you doing here?" thundered Gregory.

"I walked too far to get back for supper, and went for some bread," the man answered readily enough.

"How'd you open the door? Wasn't it locked?"

"Yes, sir; but I got the key."

He got no farther. Gregory dropped his lantern and flew at him. Hot anger and the power of authority reinforced Gregory's more than usual strength. He rained blows and invective on the offender; fisted him and booted him; kicked him under the wagon finally, with a last irate charge.

"Lie there, you dog! Till daylight, if you want to; but be out of this camp before I see you again, you son of iniquity! Blast your eyes! I'll see if stealing can't be stopped here!"

Gregory hurried away, but not fast enough to escape the man's defiant rejoinder: "Taking a loaf of bread in place of supper's no stealing. I'll be even with you for this, you damned slave-driver!"

The voice was weak, but Gregory felt the venom, and its threat.

"There's a man under the bakery that I've ordered out of camp," he said to the watchman, as the two met. "See that he goes; but give him this—the quiet, you understand." The watchman took the five dollars. "He's only worked two days; there won't be much coming in him, poor devil," the superintendent said compassionately. It was this side of Gregory's varied character that won for him the allegiance and service of the men he drove hard, though less hard than he drove himself.

Gov. Stanford established headquarters at Salt Lake City, and Superintendent Crocker flitted up and down the line to the Front whenever the Sacramento office did not claim him.

The movements of the directors seemed fatally slow to Gregory, the man of steel, who must ask no questions but execute their office-made plans. He chafed more than ever over delay in forwarding materials, for he was desperately near the end of all the rails on the coast.

"Why don't you get iron across the Isthmus?" he asked of Mr. Crocker when the latter had told of the delayed ships carrying iron, locomotives and other supplies.



"Lie There, You Dog! Till Daylight."

"We can't. It'll cost—"

"Jove and all the little gods! What does money, piles of it at any interest, if you haven't got it on hand, count for against more than 150 miles of road for all time?"

"A hundred and fifty miles? What do you mean?"

"It's that far from here to Ogden. The U. P. people get every mile they can clap iron on first. Yet their iron's away east of Ogden; and I can beat 'em there, if you'll get me the iron! Think what the business of Salt Lake valley will amount to in 10, 30, 50 years! You've simply got to have that piece of road!"

"You can't do it, Gregory!"

"By the eternal, I can! I've set my pins for it ever since that blamed spy houndswoggled me last summer. The minute the engineers cut out the Palestine tunnel I knew I was O. K. Now, don't play Pharaoh on me, Mr. Crocker! I can't build your road without iron. Get it for me, if you have to steal a foundry and pre-empt the Isthmus of Panama!"

"It can't be done in time."

"It can, sir! Telegraph the governor at Salt Lake. He'll telegraph the order, rush the foundries, a dozen of 'em. By jiminy! You can put the iron afloat in a week, have it here in 40 days!"

Mr. Crocker caught fire. "By George, Gregory! I believe we might do it. I'll have a talk over the wire with the governor." He was about to turn away, but stepped to give Gregory a paper. "There's Tuesday's Clarion, interesting reading there. They're begging the Union Pacific to fly by us, come into California by Beckworth pass and snatch our trade."

"Let the Clarion blow. We're giving the U. P. about all the knitting work they can tend to, and we and those dried-beef-cold Stoux."

"Hold on, Gregory! We'll be charged with murder, yet," laughed the other. "There's the train!" he added, as a whistle pierced the still air.

The men walked along the newly-laid track, past the construction train to the rear and awaited the approaching iron train.

"Only five cars!" groaned Gregory. "It won't keep the spikers going any time."

"Who's that woman standing in the car door? Well, it isn't Sally B.!"

Mr. Crocker exclaimed, and went forward.

There she stood, smiling, alert, her mourning discarded, her traveling suit the smartest, her strong personality raying out hypnotically to all within reach. The moment the train halted she tripped down the steep steps, and went quickly toward the two men, calling out voluble greetings on the way. First Mr. Crocker, then Mr. Gregory, she embraced with impartial cordiality, and kissed each audibly on the cheek.

"It's the same old Sally B. Time can't touch her, youth can never forget her," Mr. Crocker said gallantly. "Thank ye, Mr. Crocker; but it's me that's got to do the blarneying. I've come begging," she said bluntly, yet with her old, confident smile.

"Whatever I can do for you—" Mr. Crocker began heartily, when Gregory interrupted.

"I'll leave you to your business now, Sally B.—excuse me, Mr. Crocker—but as soon as you've finished, you go right forward to our car—first on the other side of the construction engine there. The madame'll hail you as an angel in the desert. We—"

"But I'm goin' right back to-day."

"No, you won't! You'll stay all night with us and cheer up the madame. Plenty of room." He lifted his hat with a grace that revealed somewhat of the secret of his ability to meet all situations.

That night Sally B. told her story to the sympathetic Gregorians. The human units that swung Gregory's hammers and covered under his fierce energy little dreamed of his gentler side, of the man who cherished and comforted a delicate, sensitive wife still mourning the death of their only child.

"Yes, Bill's broke all to pieces; won't never be no 'count agin, the doctor says. That last buck of his'n against the stock board tuck his pile, an' him, too, mighty nigh." Sally B.'s acquired culture dropped from her like a loosely pinned mantle. The desert,

Alvin's mother to have seen the proud flash in Sally B.'s eye. "And I'm comin' out here to work for—Bill!" Her voice trembled.

"What did the Boss give you?" Gregory asked a little later.

"Toano eatin' house."

"Good enough! There's a chump there now that don't know breakfast from a mule's hoof. I'm glad he's got to go. It's a good stand. You can hook trade from the W. P. outfit there, too."

"You bet I will! I'm just dead gone on Charley Crocker. He's been that good to me! I'm going to live now, you bet! I'm goin' to keep the dog-goned best eatin' house this side the Bay. An' I'm goin' to carry Bill on a feather pillow's long's he lives. Pore Bill! Lordy! But I'm tired!" She finished breathlessly, and collapsed in tears—tears that frightened George Gregory, who had not supposed that Sally B. possessed them.

CHAPTER XXIX.

The Message of the Dancing Girl to Esther.

To Esther, restless, unoccupied, came Sally B.'s urgent invitation to visit her at Toano. Esther accepted it at once, deciding not to wait for the Harmons. Business had delayed the judge, and now fear of small-pox for his wife. A pitted face testified his own immunity. But Esther had no fear of the disease; Toano was free from the scourge; and the breath of the wide, free desert breezing from Sally B.'s letter roused the wings of Esther's spirit.

She timed her going to catch Uncle Billy's train out from Winnemucca. Through all the years she had written him at intervals, sending her letters at first through Sally B.

She wished to surprise him. He was therefore quite unprepared for the tall, elegant young woman who waited impatiently at the rear end of the car to greet him. She saw him glance toward her as soon as he entered, and her heart leaped. But he came calmly on, from passenger to passenger, stopping here and there for question or direction. He looked her way inquiringly once or twice, but blankly.

When he was yet a few steps away, recognition came. He sprang to her, his face transfigured. Thought of stranger eyes, of official dignity, fled. He caught her hands in his own. "Honey! Stella!" he cried softly as he kissed her on the cheek, the years' hunger for her shining in his misty eyes. "Where under the canopy did you come from, honey?"

She smiled her joy, but said no word.

He still held her hands, her rings cutting under the pressure neither marked till later, his eyes searching her glowing face. Her mask had dropped; her soul was open to him.

He made her as comfortable as possible in the rough car that did duty as sleeper, coach, parlor and emigrant car all in one. When the meager business after leaving each infrequent station was dispatched he came to her again, and the long day was not half time enough for the tale of Esther's eventful life, every detail questioned and appreciated by her rapt listener.

Esther opened her eyes the next morning upon a strange life, new yet old. The Wizard Desert wrapped her again with the mantle of his enchantment. As of old, the hills walked out of their spaces to meet her. She was back in her own world, back to Sally B.'s loving arms, to Uncle Billy's tender solicitude.

"Are you happy, Mrs. Sally?" Esther asked, following her from one to another of the rough rooms, as the mistress deftly touched each chaotic spot to order.

"Lord love ye, child! I didn't know how powerful pestered I was there in Oakland an' the city till I got back here where I belong. There's folks of course that's made for toin' society's pack; some of 'em's soft, squishy critters, an' some of 'em's plumb good like Freddy Bryan; but the plains, an' work, an' men with blood in 'em, an' freedom—that's what I was born to; an' it's what I'm fit for." She was tearing an unspeakable bed to pieces with merciless scrutiny. "Gosh! The way a man runs a hotel without no woman is 'nough to make a skunk sick!"

Esther marveled at Sally B.'s reversion. Nothing of her violent effort at culture remained; and her old speech and manner seemed doubly vigorous for the long rest.

"If only Bill was—was right peart agin—" Sally B. began, but stopped abruptly and shook a pillow dangerously near to his undoing.

"Did you hear about Blowhard Cad?" she asked a little later.

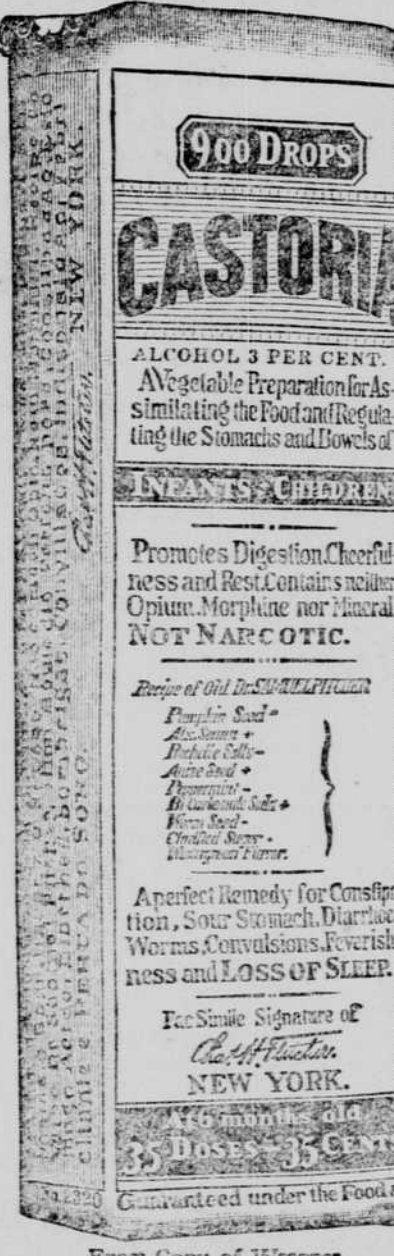
"I overheard his name in the car yesterday, but learned nothing definite."

"He's arrested for stealing from the company."

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

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