

THE RED WING.

By DAN DE QUILLE.

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CHAPTER I.

THE WRECKED EMIGRANT FAMILY.
One scorching hot day in October, 1860, I left the little town of Dayton on the Carson river for Carson City, now the capital of the state of Nevada. It was as hot as in midsummer. The road was at that time a dreary one to travel. It was the regular "Old Emigrant road"—the road leading from the sink of the Humboldt across the great Humboldt desert to the Carson river, thence over the Sierra Nevada mountains by way of the Placerville route to California. I was on foot and had before me a tramp of over 12 miles with not a human habitation in sight. My road lay through a sterile waste of alkali lands that spread away on almost a dead level in all directions to distant ranges of barren and rocky hills.

Wearily I toiled through the sand and alkali dust—the same sand and dust through which had toiled during that summer and every summer since 1849 long emigrant trains from the states east of the Missouri river. At the time of which I am speaking thousands of emigrant wagons were still rolling in across the "plains" every summer, and for some years later—until a railroad was built across the continent—they continued to pour in across the mountains and deserts. But as I tramped along I saw neither trains nor single wagons. It was late in the season for emigrants to be abroad. Most of those on the plains that year had reached and crossed the Sierras in September. Even the traders at the posts out near the deserts had folded their tents and returned to California, considering their trade over for the season.

Though no wagons were in sight on the road, signs of the great stream of emigration were to be seen on all sides. The trail along which had moved the great annual procession was well marked. The carcasses of hundreds and thousands of cattle, horses and mules strewn the ground for several hundred yards on each side of the road. Some of these carcasses were those of animals that had died only the week or the month before perhaps, while others were those of animals that had fallen and died as early as 1849 or 1850. Here on these alkali plains dead animals become mummies. They do not decay as in other places, but dry up.

It was about on that portion of the road over which I was traveling that such animals as had received deadly doses of alkali on the Humboldt, the Twenty-five Mile and other great deserts succumbed and fell to rise no more. The early settlers made miles of fences, both in town and country, out of the skins of the mummified animals that strewed this road, for at that time there was no lumber in the country. Twisted things made of the skins were stretched between posts as we now see wire fences made in many places. In this way both town lots and ranches were inclosed.

As I was plodding along I had several times caught glimpses through the flickering white waves that hovered over the alkali whitened plain of an object that looked like a small tent pitched in the midst of the broiling desert. At last I was able to make out that the white object was a small covered wagon, standing directly in the road.

Finally, as I approached, I could see several persons seated on the roadside near the wagon, a small two horse affair. Then I saw that one of the horses was down, while his mate stood by with drooping head.

"Here is trouble," said I. "Evidently a sick horse."

When I pulled up alongside the shipwrecked family, not one of them said a word. They were the most woebegone and forlorn party I had ever seen on the plains. They hardly raised their heads to look at me. All seemed utterly dejected—given over to some inconsolable grief.

A hasty survey of the scene before me showed a small and light two horse wagon, looking very shaky about the wheels, broken about the box and surmounted with a cover stretched over bows of very unequal height. The cover was of homespun linen, was patched in places with pieces of butternut colored jeans and had painted on one side in great sprawling letters the defiant warwhoop "Californy or Bust." A large water cask was slung underneath the wagon, and a red feed trough, nearly gnawed in two, hung behind.

In front of the rickety wagon stood an old bald faced horse, still attached to the vehicle by the trace chains and his end of the neckyoke. Poor old fellow! Such another angular, harness galled, sunken eyed, melancholy beast I had not seen in many a day.

Near by his mate lay dead—"alkali-killed." He seemed to have dropped down in his tracks and died—died with no greater struggle than to throw his head and neck out across the footpath running by the side of the wagon track.

On a fragment of rock near the dead horse sat a man—a man about 45 years of age—looking as though hope had utterly forsaken his breast. His feet, incased in alkali reddened and torn brogans, were half hidden in the dust of the road in which they were listlessly planted. His head was bowed until it almost reached his knees, and the wilted brim of his home wrought straw hat almost concealed his sun browned and unshaven face.

Near to this man—the head of the family—sat a bundle—a bundle which I should not immediately have recognized as a human being had I not observed a pair of shriveled, clawlike hands clasped across what seemed the knees. There was something so weird about this object in its shapelessness that, after I had discovered it to be alive and evidently human, it quite fascinated me. I found myself constantly

turning to watch it. A rather startling phenomenon was that the bundle continually rocked to and fro and occasionally gave out some kind of muttering, during the delivery of which it rocked quite violently. As the face and all the upper part of the body were covered with a huge sunbonnet—a bonnet to which was attached an extraordinarily voluminous cape—I arrived at the conclusion that the muttering "party" before me was a woman and probably the grandmother of the "expedition."

Two boys of about 8 and 10 years, each with his baggy tow linen trousers hitched up nearly to his chin, sat flat in the dust at the head of the dead horse, whose nose one of them was fondly stroking. The faces of both were smeared with dust and tears, and both were still quietly blubbering and whispering together.

A girl of about 17 sat in the front of the wagon, vainly striving to quiet a child that was moaning in a weak, sick way in her arms. The features of the girl were finely formed, but her face was sadly sunburned. Her bonnet was off, and a wealth of brown hair fell in waves over her shoulders and hung in tangles about her face. At a glance it was to be seen that many cares and troubles had fallen upon this young girl, leaving her little time in which to think of herself or her personal appearance.

A little girl, with flaxen locks hanging about her eyes, was on her knees beside the young woman, leaning over the end board of the wagon and gazing with blue eyes full of wonder upon all around—that is, when she was not engaged in gnawing, childlike, at the board upon the edge of which her two little brown paws rested. All this I saw almost at a glance. For some mo-



All this I saw almost at a glance. I stood gazing on the really distressing scene, yet no one broke the sorrowful silence. They seemed persons who had seen so little of kindness and who had received so little aid or sympathy from any one that they had lost faith in their kind.

At last I went up to the man seated on the small bowler. I touched him on the shoulder and said, "Stranger, you appear to be about at the end of your string here."

"Yes, sir. Clean done for! Clean done for!" giving me a single mournful glance, then turning to pick abstractedly at a thread in a blue jeans patch on the knee of his butternut trousers.

At first I felt like laughing as I gazed upon the lugubrious faces all about me, but a moment's reflection showed me that, as the man said, they were "clean done for," sure enough.

Not a man nor a team was in sight in any direction. All about lay the sterile, waterless alkali waste, covered or rather made ragged by a sparse growth of sagebrush.

"Have you any money, my friend, with which to buy another horse?" I at last asked, though I felt that it was an idle question.

"Money!" cried the man, as though startled and shocked at the question, and he turned and looked me full in the face for the first time with wide open eyes. "Money? No, sir. Not a cent, sir—not the first red cent! That that team was all I totch from ole Missouri with me—it was my only hope."

Again he relapsed, hung his head and resumed picking at the patch on his knee, just as though having said all that could be said in regard to the situation it was useless to waste breath in further talk.

I stood hesitating for a moment and then again shook the man up: "Stranger, what do you think of doing? If you stay here, all hands of you will perish. This is a terrible place, my friend!"

"Wa-al, I kain't somehow think what ter do," said the man, without raising his head. "I'm er tryin ter think, but somehow I kain't think."

CHAPTER II.
GRANDMOTHER MUMFORD, "THE LIVING BUNDLE."

The living bundle seated on the roadside bank near at hand now attracted my attention. It began to swing back and forth in a very violent manner, and at last, after some few preliminary internal rumblings, it gave utterance to these words: "Oh, Mumford! Oh, Mumford!"

Turning to the man on the rock, I shook him up and asked, "Is your name Mumford?"

"No, sir," said he. "No, she's a-thinkin of—a-thinkin 'bout her ole man—him she lost."

"Well, come, rouse up, my friend!" cried I, almost losing my patience. "You can't remain here with this family on your hands. What do you think of doing?"

"I know it's bad for the folks," said the man, never raising his head, "but what kin I do? I'm clean done for, an I try to think what ter do, but somehow I kain't think."

"Oh, Mumford! Oh, Mumford!" cried the old lady hidden somewhere within the bundle in such a loud and thrilling tone that I turned and looked at her in alarm. She was rocking herself at such a rate that she seemed to

bounce an inch or two off the ground at each pendulumlike vibration.

Again all was silent. The old lady was still diligently vibrating, but was now voiceless. The man on the rock seemed trying to pull an idea of some kind out of the patch on the knee of his trousers.

"Pore ole Betty!" said one of the little boys as he patted the neck of the dead mare, as I now discovered the horse to be. "Pore ole Betty!"

"Will daddy leave her wif all of der nasty dead cows?" queried the younger boy, trying to open and look into one of the dead mare's eyes.

About this time I felt a sort of lump rising in my throat and began to want to see something like action somewhere.

"Come, my friend," said I as I thought struck me; "rouse up!" slapping the man on the back. "There are dozens of big freight teams going back to California every day from Virginia City, and all return without back loads of any kind. You here are not far from the main California road, and one of these return teams will haul you and all your traps. Come, my man, you'll be all right yet!"

"But I hain't got no money. Tain't no use. I've seed teams and teams, an I've axed 'em to help me along. None of 'em wouldn't haul me. They all come on an left us alone back in the deserts. They all talked money, money—money fust an money last. I hain't got no money."

"But that was while your team was still on its legs. Now they can't refuse. Besides, the California teamsters are very different men from those who passed you on the plains, where it is 'devil take the hindmost.'"

"I tell yer 'tain't no use!" cried the man pettishly.

"Oh, Mumford! Oh, Mumford!" cried the old lady, and she began to bounce about so violently that I feared she would roll off the bank into the road.

"Tut, tut, mammy!" remonstrated my man.

Beginning to lose patience with all this idle mummery, I turned suddenly to the swaying bundle and said, "For God's sake, what is the meaning of all this nonsense about Mumford?"

This was like giving the bundle an electrical shock. Half springing from her seat, the old woman gave her immense poke bonnet so vigorous an upward thrust that it was sent flying from her head into the dust, exposing to view for the first time a thin, wrinkled face and spare, diminutive form—a little "atomy" of a woman.

"What is the nonsense about Mumford? Is that what you ask, sir? There is no nonsense about Mumford!" Her alkali gray hair stood bristling all over her head. A wild light burned in her sunken gray eyes, and she stretched out toward me a skinny arm and clawlike hand almost in a menacing manner. "There never was any nonsense about Mumford! No, sir! Mumford, sir, was my husband for 40 years, and there was no nonsense about him! But," she added in a calmer tone, "Mumford is not—he is no more. He sleeps on the banks of Green river. We left him there. He sleeps there under the trees, where I, too, should sleep!" Her hand dropped, and in a sobbing voice she said: "Yes, under the trees, thank God for that! Under the beautiful green trees! He was born among the tall green trees of Kentucky, lived among trees all his life, died among trees! When, far out in the desert, the doctor told him he was dying, that he had only a few minutes to live, he asked to be raised up that he might look out of the wagon. 'No,' said he. 'I can't die here, and what is more, I won't! There is not a tree in sight! Drive on! When you've come to some decent sort of place for a man to die in, I won't fight against going.' He lived, sir, while the wagon crawled over miles and miles of desert—lived till we reached Green river and was laid on his bed under the trees. Then he took my hand and said: 'Ah, the trees are green, and I hear the birds singing. Sally, goodbye—I'll die now.' I said 'Goodbye, Mumford,' and he was dead."

"Thomas! Thomas!" called a shrill but weak voice from the wagon. "Thomas, is that another a-talkin'?"

"Thomas, is the 'doubting Thomas'—who had all this time remained sitting dejectedly on the rock, arose and slouched along to the wagon, hardly lifting his feet above the dust.

The animated bundle followed Thomas with her eyes. Turning to me, she then said: "I'm his mother-in-law. He's a stick—a perfect stick!" said she decidedly. "Yes," repeated she, "a perfect stick! Oh, that by keeping Mumford before him—that by calling Mumford up in his mind—I could get him to show a little of the spirit of Mumford!"

In a moment Thomas came back and said to me: "Nancy—that's my wife, sir—wants to see you. She's a-lyin sick in the wagon."

Nodding to the young girl, who was holding the sick child at the front of the vehicle, and placing a hand on the flaxen locks of the little one by her side, I looked into the interior of the "family mansion" just as a tall, thin, hollow eyed woman was rising from some quilts.

Resting in a sitting position by holding on to the side of the wagon, the woman gazed wistfully at me.

"I am told that you are ill, good woman," said I.

"Oh, yes, sir—very, sir! I've mountain fever."

Now that I fully comprehended the distressed condition of this poor, sick, friendless, moneyless, shipwrecked family, I was so overcome that, as I stood facing the wistful eyes of the sick woman, I knew not how to speak in a way to comfort her.

Nodding toward the young girl holding the infant, the woman said: "Mary says she heard you tell daddy—my husband out there—that some of the teams goin back to Californy might help us. Oh, sir, if they only would! When pore ole Betty stopped, fell down and died, everything for us stopped right thar. In

a minute every hope we had was gone. It was bad enough for daddy before, but when he seed the ole mare drop dead he just let go all holts. Pore man! He's clean discouraged."

I assured the woman that all I had said of the teams and teamsters was true.

"Are there many teams on the road now, sir?" asked Mary.

"A great many—hundreds. The business houses and the big mining companies of the Comstock are now getting in their winter goods and supplies. Hundreds of teams are coming and going across the mountains. We should see many of them were we a few miles farther on—were we where this road falls into the one that leads over the mountains."

"Oh, if I could see them, sir!" cried Mary. "If they could see mother—see us all—see the awful place we are in, they would help us, sir. Yes, they would help us to get away from here!"

"Indeed they would," said I. "They may look rough—their work is rough—but the majority are noble hearted fellows, and there is not a man among them all so mean that he would pass you by."

"Oh, thank you, sir! Thank you! Oh, mother, do you hear?" And the kind hearted girl began kissing the sick baby to hide her tears.

Looking up presently, she said: "Mother has been sick so long, and now pore little Kitty is sick, and we haven't any money and hardly anything left that's fit even for us well ones to eat. What can we do here in this desert but die?"

"No, you will not die. You are all safe now, and you will soon all be well and happy."

"Oh, mother, do you hear that? The stranger says we are all safe now!" and again the worn young creature began kissing Kitty, tears streaming down her cheeks.

"Look about you, Mary—look about at the desert and the dead beasts all about us, and you'll see how safe we are!" And thus speaking the sick and despondent mother groaned aloud.

"Be of good cheer, child, and try to put some heart into the others," said I to Mary. "I still say you are all safe. Our Comstock people have assisted hundreds of emigrants that have come in here off the deserts in distress. You are but a few miles away from Virginia City. The people there will most certainly take care of you and find a way for you to get to California."

"God bless them!" said Mary.

"Will you please call Thomas, my husband, sir, to get me some water?" asked the sick woman, who had fallen back on her couch and was trying to moisten her parched lips with her equally dry and fevered tongue.

I at once went to the husband, and giving him a shake to rouse him out of his state of dreamy dejection told him what his wife required.

As I was about to return to the wagon to tell Mary that I would not lose sight of them until they were hauled out of the desert and safe, I felt a clutch at the skirt of my coat. Turning about, I found the old woman gazing keenly, eagerly, upon my face. This old woman I now began to see had an eye and an ear open for all that was going on about her, notwithstanding that at first sight she seemed a mere heedless, imbecile bundle.

"That man," said she, "is a good enough husband to my darter, but, la! he ain't one of our kind—he ain't Kaintucky stock! He ain't like pore Mumford was—hain't got the stir! When things went like this, Mumford he'd git mad. La, you jest ought to see how he'd 'ar round! Swar? Why, he'd swar terrible, Mumford would. But he's at rest now, pore man! On the banks of the Green river he lies, under the beautiful trees, where the birds sing all the day long. Mumford, now, he was a man, sir, as could do justice to a starvation such as this. But he—dear soul—he has gone to his reward." Suddenly changing her tone, the old lady laid a bony hand upon my arm: "Now, see here, you jest see what you



"Now, see here, you jest see what you kin do for us! He!"—nodding her head toward the wagon—"he's a stick, you know."

I faithfully promised the Mumford relic that I would see them all out of their troubles.

CHAPTER III.
THE "RED WING."

After getting a drink of water out of the barrel that hung under the wagon, I left to seek assistance, bidding all be of good cheer, as relief would reach them in a few hours at furthest.

I struck out west, across the desert to the much traveled California road, which wound along the foothills. Not a California team was in sight. Turning north on the road toward Virginia City, I pushed forward in the hope of soon meeting a string of teams headed for California.

I had followed the road leading to Virginia City about four miles, to a point almost in sight of Silver City, when the music of bells greeted my ears—bells such as are worn by the animals in the big 10, 12 and 14 mule teams. Soon a long string of big teams came in sight rolling on with a perfect crash

(Continued on page 3)

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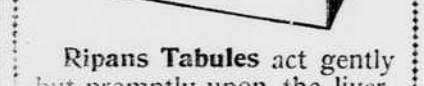
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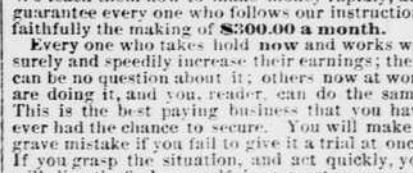
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