

JIM'S WIFE.

(M. M. Davis in the Current.)

I never saw his face, nor hers. But I sometimes saw his hands, long and thin and white, with that pallor peculiar to plants grown in the dark and human beings shut out from light and air.

It was midsummer, and the broad street, that ran down into the open plaza around which Comanche is built, was white with dust, and already reflected back the hot glow of a scorching sun, although it was yet early when I drew back the curtain that draped my little window and looked out, on the morning after my arrival. The heavy shadows of an immense live-oak cooled all the front of the low, irregularly built, log house into which I had come as a summer guest, but the big, square county jail, nearly opposite, stood naked and bare to the light, absorbing the heat into its solid white stone walls and casting it out again in quivering rays that thrilled all the breathless air.

Everything was so still just at that moment; she herself was so motionless standing there in the middle of the street with the child lifted in her arms, his little bare legs showing white against her rusty black dress, and his head almost hidden beneath the faded yellow sunbonnet that covered her face; the sky was of so deep and strange a blue and the shadow of the single scraggy mesquite beyond her lay so sharp and black upon the dazzling sand, that I had a curious sensation as if I were looking into a picture. But only for a moment. A clattering group of horsemen, booted and spurred, rode past; she moved a step or two out of their way, stopped and placed the child upon the ground, then stood erect and lifted her face again toward the dark, narrow upper windows of the jail. And I, too, looking up, saw for the first time those long, pallid hands folded about the rusty iron bars!

I dropped the curtain and turned—to be smothered in morning kisses, as the children, going, r.s., bright, came trooping in from their early breakfast.

Toward noon of the same day I stepped out upon the vine-hung gallery. A glad, life-giving wind was blowing down from the great, purple, flat-topped mountains, just over beyond the bright sweep of open prairie set about the little town, and the mesquite groves up on the hillside were tossing their feathery branches in it joyously. The wonderful lapis-lazuli blue sky was flecked with white masses of slow-moving clouds; one of these laid half the village square in the shade, in the midst of which I could see the town well, with its broad stone curbing, and the knot of men and boys grouped about it, their hats off and foreheads bared to the wind. A cowboy in picturesque costume came riding across the sun-lit half of the plaza, and his gay laugh floated on to me as he answered a mellow halloo from far off in the distance. It was a pretty scene, and I stood reaching for the flower that swung above my head, and letting my gaze wander in delight from purple mountains to golden valley and back again, until it fell suddenly upon a black spot in the street close by, and I realized with a shock that she was still there. The child lay at her feet, apparently asleep, a little white heap in the dust; the hands had disappeared from the window-bars above, but just where I had seen her first she stood, straight, slender, silent, motionless. The flower fell from my hand and the heart seemed all at once to go out of me.

She was always there. When I lifted my curtain in the wan gray of early morning, I saw her there, or I saw her trudging down the sandy road, with the child in her arms toward her dreary post.

Day after day the pitiless August sun beat down upon her as she kept her station before that gloomy facade. Sometimes, but not often, she sat down prone in the dust, but always in the same spot—the spot where she bet could see those clinging hands. People went up and down the street; the tide of labor flowed back and forth; men rode in to the various courts and rode out again; wagons creaked by, covered with white canvas, from beneath which the curious eyes of sorrow women and shock-headed children peered down at her. But none of these things seemed to enter into her consciousness; she looked neither to right nor left, and the weeks wearing away found her with face still turned upward to the long, narrow window, patient, quiet, fixed, the child always beside her, mute and motionless as herself. Sometimes a second pair of hands grasped the bars. "That's Jim's younger brother," they told me. "It's high about six year since they dropped her man, and I want in a cool-blooded murder neither. They've trailed about God knows how and he only knows when, keep'er but'n the sheriff's way, and whenever they've went she's want to, and sense they've been here she comes in every little while and stays round like this yer. Jim's her husband, you know." Ah, as if I didn't know!

My heart ached for her and I used to long, yet dread, to see her face. But I never did, though she once removed the faded sunbonnet as she passed me in the dim twilight, going down to the camp in the edge of the thicket, where she and the child slept at night under the dark sky with its solemn stars. But it was so late that I could see only a lonely pallor and sunken eyes that seemed not to see.

One morning, at last, I saw her climb into a rickety open buggy, drawn by the meagre gray horse that had been staked near her camp. I saw her settle the child in her lap, grasp the reins and drive slowly up the long hill that leads out of the town. At the top of it she paused and stood up in the buggy, looking back. Her slender form was sharply defined against the early morning sky for a moment—I can see it yet. Then she sank back into her seat, and presently she had passed out of sight.

The mountains that had been wrapped in purple mists when they had sent their sweet, fresh breezes into the heart of the midsummer, stood up blue and clear against the cold, gray sky of November. All day long a northern had been roaring down from them, twisting the bare, thorny branches of the mesquite thickets,

breaking the limbs of the great, isolated, olive-colored live-oaks; whistling through the dry grass of the little prairie, striking like a solid thing upon the shivering sides of the shelterless, gaunt, long-horned cattle, and sweeping with a moan into the streets of the town. The little town itself, all the warmth and color blown out of it, looked deserted, for it was Sunday, and every man was housed with his own in the glow of his hearth fire.

As night came, the wind grew keener, with a suggestion of sleet upon it. The old stage lumbered in, arousing the dogs as it passed but presently these dropped into stillness again. The lights behind the windows began early to disappear, and one by one went out, except in a house far down in a hollow, where the divine hour of a woman was approaching—there only twinkled all night the feeble rays of a lamp.

There, and in the square stone jail where the gurgles watched and dozed alternately in the hall below, and in the cells above the prisoners shivered on their scanty pallets.

Down the long hill, close upon midnight, into the midst of this stillness and gloom, rode two score and more of men. Grim, silent and pitiless, with faces veiled and belts bristling with weapons, they came like phantoms from some unknown dark.

The heavy thud of a ponderous beam upon the door of the jail! The guards within start to their feet. The prisoners grasp each other in a hush of expectation into which creeps the hope of deliverance. Again and again the dull sound mingles with the ever-increasing roar of the wind and the dash of the rain. Then there is the crash of splintering wood and a rush like that of doom, silent and mighty, up the narrow stairway, with the white and stricken guards driven on before. Deliverance! The solid key groans in the lock, the smoky lamp throws a ghastly glare into the cold cell.

And presently emerges into the freezing night air a long, double file of men whose faces are hidden, but whose clenched hands betray too well a lack of mercy; and in the midst thereof walk two barefooted, half-naked, shivering creatures, with the ropes already knotted about their necks.

And so silently hurries this ghostly procession up the wind-swept hill and across the barren heath, that not even the watch-dogs are aroused from their slumbers. One old hunter, indeed, lifts his head from his pillow with the instinct of danger upon him; rises upon his elbow and listens to the sighing of the wind, while the glow of the dying fire reddens the barrel of the rifle swung above his door, laughs contentedly as he hears nothing else and drops back into dreamland.

Behind the jail doors are left wide open, but the other prisoners, frozen with horror, cower back into their cells and pray.

And out yonder the work is finished; finished remorselessly and in silence. One of the victims indeed begs for the life of his younger brother, and the other prays that he may be shot. But that is all. But white and cold already, before death has had time to freeze the blood in their veins, they are left swinging to and fro in the frantic gusts of wind, while those veiled phantoms of the night mount their horses and ride swiftly back into the unknown dark from whence they came.

The little town sleeps peacefully on, and midnight has not yet sounded.

It is still the Lord His Day.

And that old murder has been "avenged!"

Ah, but over yonder, more than fifty miles away, that Sunday morning, a slender little woman had climbed into an old rickety, open buggy. I have told you that I never saw her face, but I make no doubt that at that moment her face beneath the faded sunbonnet was beautiful; a lovely light, as of first youth and first love, played over the lonely pallor of her cheeks; her sunken eyes shone and a bonny smile parted her lips as she leaned forward and gathered up the reins and started the bony slow-moving horse on the long and wearisome journey. For "the boys" bond had been signed. To-morrow they would be set free—for a time at least—and a respite meant everything. No need now to look beyond the overwhelming gladness of the one thought that to-morrow they—she—would be free, and she would be there to receive them once more into light and air and life!

Fifty miles, why, that is nothing! Across long and lonely reaches of "rough," where the old horse plows his way painfully through heavy sand, stumbling every now and then upon the shin-oak roots that twist their loose, ugly knots over the road; through bits of brown, dreary prairie, where the uncertain wheels creak over great clods of black earth, lumped by the cold into sharp masses as hard as a rock; down into ravines deep-washed-out, where the shadows lie heavily, and where wild things, with eyes that shine, creep stealthily from crevice to crevice; over soggy bottom-lands, strewn with wrecks of overloaded freighters, where the crows caw on the big cotton-wool and discuss angrily the pale passer-by.

Fifty miles, why, that is nothing! It is cold and the wind stings her face like so many needles; her bare hands are blue and stiff and her feet are numb. But do you think she feels on her forehead the frozen air which presently melts into a blinding rain, as she sits far forward on the seat and urges the old horse along?

A mule-rabbit, with long, pointed ears and glistening coat of fat, gathers himself up at the side of the road prepared to speed away, but aware of her unseeing eye, settles himself comfortably in his bed of dried grass and stalks out at her; a couple of deer, tawny and sleek, lying in the shelter of a hollow, lift their heads and drop them again as she goes by. The few horsemen she meets pass her without the customary salutation, averted into silence by the remoteness of her gaze; yet turn to look afterward, remembering the joyous smile upon her lips.

And night falls and those awful phantoms are somewhere yelling their faces! The next day is well worn when she crosses the low flat and ascends the hill at the foot of which nestles the town. It is still cold, but the clouds have broken and a sudden flood of light bathes the valley and turns the windows to coppery

gold. A bird somewhere in the distance, as the jaded old horse breaks into a stumbling trot, throws out upon the frosty air a succession of joyous notes that are caught up and answered by another still further off. She pushes back her bonnet and draws a long, restful breath. Ah, there is the big stone school-house and the snug little cottages on either side of the street; and there is the low log-house so full last summer of merry laughter and music and light and—why, what a crowd about the jail door! Oh, yes, they are there to welcome the boys; why, of course, and how kind! Only she longed to be the first to meet him.

The old horse slackens his pace and creeps on; she leans out eagerly letting the lines fall, and clasping her hands, while the color comes and goes on her pale cheeks. She does not see them! But then her eyes are dimmed no doubt by the wind and rain and cold. Stand aside here, gentlemen! She has come to meet them; do you not understand?

She is lifted gently down and her faltering steps are supported as she moves blindly forward. The pitying crowd parts; two or three men rise hurriedly from beside the things that lie white and stark and rigid upon the ground.

Well! Well, the meeting is over.

HATCHING OYSTERS.

What the Infant Bivalves Look Like—Their Early Youth-Enemies.

(New York Tribune.) To investigate the mysteries of oyster farming would open the eyes of the pig-breeder and chicken-raiser, and from what was learned of the business yesterday, it may be safely said that it will be some years before "fanciers" will take a fancy to this kind of pastime and worry their brains as to how oyster eggs should be incubated, or how the young fry should be housed and reared. A good oyster will lay 365 eggs in a year. A good oyster, if well fed and cared for, will lay 128,000,000.

But there is no bonanza in this, for oyster eggs don't bring quite as much a dozen as hens' eggs, and it is not every man who knows whether he is handling oyster eggs or not. In hatching the hen sets on her eggs. The oyster eggs set themselves, as it were, and hatch into delightful orphanhood. They hatch in from four to ten hours, and they are never annoyed with wet feathers. They are curious little things. Professor Rice, who has charge of the oyster hatchery at Cold Springs, says that their heads resemble a high-crowned Derby hat, while their tails can scarcely be distinguished from a hat of soft felt with the brim turned down all round. These beings disport themselves in the water, are free swimmers for three or four days, and gradually assume the shape of round clams. Finally they "set" upon some object in the water, a stone most likely, if one is at hand, and then take upon themselves the personality of the oyster.

That the oyster has habits none can deny, but it is not certain yet, not in Professor Rice's mind, what they are. He feels warranted in saying that they are a moral race, attending strictly to their own business, eating to live, and living to be eaten. The oyster has two enemies that prey upon it diligently, as if appointed for that purpose, the star fish and the drill. The former with its five long arms settles down upon the bivalve, clutches it as one would clutch an apple in his hand, taking care that no portion of the edge of the shell remain uncovered. The enemy watches till the oyster gets hungry or wants to breathe. The instant the shell is opened, the star fish floods the inside of it with his gastric juice, the oyster dies and is eaten it is not known how long an oyster can keep its shell closed under these circumstances, but Professor Rice found one that remained so for eight days under others. The drill is a snail-like creature that grows from a capsule deposited on the shell of an oyster, and when of age it begins to bore its way into the bivalve's home. Once in he easily kills the unsuspecting thing and devours it. It takes the drill at least two weeks to bore through a shell.

New York's Night Schools.

(New York Commercial Advertiser.) No fewer than 12,000 pupils reported last evening at the twenty-seven night schools. The fact affords excellent evidence of the lively interest which is taken in the educational advantages afforded by these schools to those who have no other chance of tuition. Among the pupils are to be found many grown men, whose early opportunities for receiving instruction were slender, or perhaps entirely wanting.

The mass of the studious throng, however, is composed of hard-working lads and lasses who feel their deficiencies, and gladly avail themselves of the night schools' opportunities to make them good. The course continues for twenty-four weeks, the average attendance at each school being 500. The curriculum embraces not only elementary work, but in the evening high school offers a broad commercial course, including the modern languages. The night schools are excellently conducted, and the work they do is peculiarly excellent.

Good Advice from an Expert.

(Atlanta Constitution.) The demand for stimulants is more general in this country than it has been in our past history. Hundreds of thousands of good temperance people who would die before they would use liquor are resorting to opium, chloral, bicarbonates and phosphates. When a man feels badly he takes aromatic spirits of ammonia, bicarbonate of soda, or some new-fangled phosphate. Some men load themselves with quinine. Every day new nerve stimulants are advertised, and people take them as freely as water. We are trifling with our nerves, and there is no excuse for it. All that we have to do when we find that we are living too fast is to put on the brakes and exercise a little common sense about matters of diet and rest.

A Long Way Up.

(Polly L. Oswald.) If a nation of giants could build a flight of stairs from the foothills to the crest of Mount Everest it would take a traveler at least three days to climb up to the top, for that staircase would be seventy-five miles long, and contain about half a million steps.

Counterfeit Silver Coins.

(New York Times.) "Every silver coin now in circulation has its counterfeit. Even the huzzard dollar has not been deemed unworthy of imitation. Trade dollars were coined from 1873 to 1878. They weigh 430 grains. Every issue has been extensively counterfeited. Most of the counterfeits are over 100 grains light and have a soapy, greasy feeling. They are made of type metal and pulverized glass. The two most dangerous counterfeits of the trade dollar are dated 1877, and bear the mint marks, 'a' and 'c.' They are only three grains light and are actually worth 57 cents. They are made of silver, mercury, and German silver, and, except for a defective ring, are nearly perfect. Standard dollars were first coined in 1794, and then as now the mint weight was 412.5 grains. Many of the old issues were counterfeited. The composition used was generally German silver. Others were made of brass and plated with genuine silver.

Coinage of the Bland standard dollar was begun in 1876. All the issues since that time have been extensively counterfeited, the usual composition being antimony and lead, heavily plated. They are made in a mold and are usually 100 grains light. There are, however, several counterfeits of the standard dollar which are nearly full weight and are very dangerous. They are almost perfect imitations. The ring is a little defective. Half dollars prior to 1837 weighed 208 grains. From 1837 to 1853, the weight was 206.25 grains. The present weight is 192.9 grains. There are probably more counterfeits of half dollars afloat than of any other coin. Most of them are made of brass, lead, pewter, and type metals in varying combinations and proportions. The most dangerous counterfeit halves bear date of 1841, 1842, 1843, 1845, 1849, 1857, 1859, 1860, 1872, 1875, 1876, and 1877. Most of these are lighter than the genuine and have a sharp ring, as if they were made of glass. The milling and reeding is defective, and the lettering on the shield of the goddess of liberty is not good.

A genuine silver quarter dollar weighs 96.45 grains. Prior to 1837 the weight was 104 grains, and from 1837 to 1853 the weight was 103.125 grains. The most dangerous counterfeits are of 1853, 1854, 1855, 1857, 1858, 1860 and 1861. Brass, tin, pewter and lead are the materials generally used. The counterfeits are made in a mold, and except that the reeding and milling is defective, and that the latter counterfeits have a greasy, slippery feeling, they are not easily detected.

The coinage of 50-cent pieces began in 1875 and closed in 1878. The genuine coin weighs 77.16 grains, and the few counterfeits which have been put in circulation are very poor pieces of work. Counterfeit dimes are very common, brass, pewter and lead being generally used. The genuine coin weighs 28.55 grains. The counterfeits are usually very rough-looking coins. The half dime weighs 19.29 grains. A few wretched counterfeits are in circulation. Coinage of the genuine began in 1792 and ceased in 1873. Counterfeits of the 3-cent piece began in 1851 and ceased in 1873. The weight is 11.53 grains.

Some Valuable Timbers.

(Memphis Appeal.) The tupelo gum and the willow oak are timbers that are destined to a commercial value never until recently dreamed of. A gentleman residing in Mississippi who has tested them thoroughly says the first variety is almost as soft and light as the cork of commerce, and is the whitest timber in the valley. It is extremely light and can not be split, and at the same time is very tough and tenacious and will bear a very heavy strain. It will, some day soon, be used principally for buckets, bowls, pitchers, and trays; also for oar-locks, and for almost all kinds of water vessels. For bread trays it is the finest in the world. The wood grows among the cypress trees, and is far more abundant, and floats like cork. The water or willow oak is second only to the live oak, and is almost as evergreen; it takes the coldest weather to make it shed its leaves, and it is almost as hard when seasoned as the live oak, and for the rim and spokes of wheels it has no superior. For ship-building it is almost equal to the live oak. "I have tested the crushing capacity of this wood," this Mississippian says, "and also the transverse strength, and it is one-third stronger than any white, post, red or cedar oak, and only one-eighth less than live oak. And yet this wood has no market value."

Barrels From Straw Pulp.

(Chicago Tribune.) Barrels for shipping flour, sugar, and other dry commodities are now being successfully manufactured from straw pulp, and may possibly come into general use in the future. In the manufacture the straw pulp is run in a mold and then compressed by powerful machinery. The barrels seem to answer fully for ordinary shipping purposes, but have no apparent advantages over the wood barrels commonly used, being about the same price and weight.

Frugality.

(John Randolph.) Frugality—it is in the power of every honest man, who means to retain his honesty, to refrain from indulging in expenses which he can not afford. A disregard of this maxim, the result of their ignorant indolence of their own affairs, has ruined all my name and race; they did not know what they could afford, and some, I fear, did not care.

A Frivolous Effort.

(Louisville Courier-Journal.) A Louisville critic, doing up a theatre opening, speaks of "the enormity of the audience." This is a brave bolt from the stereotyped "house that was crowded to its utmost capacity."

Not Commensurate.

A northern Texas editor complains that the number of marriages is ridiculously small when compared with the time squandered in buggy riding.

In spite of the big figures, only 3 per cent. of the cholera cases in France have proved fatal.

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