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THE BUTLER CITIZEN.

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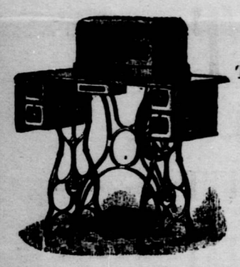

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"THAT WAGON OF OURS."

(G. M. McCLELLAND IN HARPER'S WEEKLY.)

I had been in the place about two years when it happened. It was a good place—with Cartwright & Co., dealers in wagons and agricultural implements. My employers were straightforward men, and treated their clerks with consideration, but, from the start, I made up my mind that I wouldn't permanently stick to the business. The fact is, my father and grandfather had both been doctors, and the love of healing was in the blood, so a doctor I was determined to be just as soon as I could save money enough for college expenses. There was nobody dependent on me, and when a fellow has his eye set singly on one goal he is capable of a good many personal sacrifices to speed the running. At the time I speak of I had five hundred dollars in bank, and was beginning to think—to use a bit of slang—that I would "get there" after a while.

One day, just about dinner-time, a mighty alert and masterful fellow, with a red mustache and eyes like a hawk, came into our place, and wanted to look at a wagon. We showed what we had in stock, and he poked and tapped and asked questions about hubs and axles as knowing as a farmer. Next day he came again, and he and Mr. Cartwright worked to terms for a good two-horse wagon, about the best we had in stock. The fellow was as smart as a steel-trap—which farmers are usually not—and I couldn't help enjoying the neatness with which he fetched our "boss" down to the lowest possible notch. It was funny, for Cartwright was accounted a shrewd hand at a bargain.

The wagon was to go to a young woman in the country, at all events, to a single woman, for the address the fellow gave me started with "Miss." The rest of it got mixed, through my carelessness, they said afterward, and came out differently from what was intended. I certainly set down the address as it sounded to me, and the afternoon of the day on which it was bought I started the wagon on its travels.

When a week had passed, in bounced the red-mustached fellow again, in a terrible temper, wanting to know "why in thunder that wagon had never been shipped."

Mr. Cartwright called me up, as I generally attended to the shipment of goods, and for a minute or two we had it backwardand forward pretty lively. The wagon had not put in an apperance at the place where it was due, and the lady, after waiting and hoping for a season, had written to inquire the cause of the delay. The fellow with the red mustache at first was mad enough to lay for gore, but he cooled down after a bit, and we proceeded to locate the blunder. In about two minutes we found it. He had told me send that wagon of ours to "Miss M. N. O. Vernon, Tarleton," and I had misunderstood him clear through, and shipped the thing to "Miss Mensie Vane, Tatters."

When I read this precious address out, Cartwright, who is a jovial man, laughed right out, and so did the other fellow, in spite of being aggravated.

"Where the devil is 'Tatters,' Mr. Jones?" my employer demanded.

"God knows!" I piously responded, feeling pretty sure that the matter was beyond human ken.

"You'd better pray for a revelation double-quick, then," Mr. Cartwright briskly announced. "That wagon of ours cost sixty-five dollars, and if you don't track it up and reship it inside of a fortnight, you'll have it to pay for. I can't have my goods, or my credit either, go to 'Tatters' through another man's blundering."

The pun was execrable, but it enabled Cartwright to end his sentence in a pleasanter tone than he commenced it. There is something genial in a pun, and the worse it is the better humor it puts the man in who makes it.

For the next few days I had about as much wagon on hand as if I were conducting an emigrant train in the good old days of wagon supremacy. I breakfasted, dined, and supped with my mind hitched to that infernal vehicle, dragging it, or rather being dragged by it, from mountains to seaboard and back again. It was my daily thought, my nightly dream. I gridironed the State with telegrams. I haunted the depots and cross-examined the train-men until they could have gnashed their teeth with impatience at my persecution of them. At last I got hold of the conductor of the freight train which had carried the abominable thing away. From him I learned that the wagon had gone from one end of his route to the other, and found no stopping-place, and that he, supposing that "Tatters" must be on some other line, had left it in the Central Depot to be transferred. He regarded me steadfastly as he made this statement, and remarked at its close that he had never heard of any place called "Tatters" in his born days. Was I positive that there was any such place in Virginia?

Of course I was not positive, and I told him so. Indeed, doubts as to whether there were such a place in America, or in the world, constantly obtruded themselves. For nearly ten days this "Tatters" had defied my best efforts at discovery, and it might, and in all probability would, remain a *terra incognita* to the end of time.

"That's a bad show for your wagon," the conductor observed.

And I agreed with him.

That fellow with the red mustache was nearly the death of me. If I heard the word *wagon* repeated once I heard it, on an average, fifty times a day, until I longed fiercely to expunge it from all spoken languages. Should the thing ever be recovered, I felt that the first use to which it might legitimately be put would be that of hauling me to an asylum. I was sorry for that young woman in the country, too, waiting for her wagon, like the chorus in the old song. I knew, of course, that if that vehicle should not turn up, I would have to pay for it. The blunder had been of my making and must be of my mending. But I couldn't be satisfied to let the matter rest that way. Sixty-five dollars is a good lump of money to be docked from a clerk's salary; and besides, it looked ridiculous that as big a thing as a two-horse wagon could not be traced.

Matters were in this fix when an old chum of mine, a man I had not seen for months, came to town. He had been for years a drummer for a big dry-goods house, but had recently been taken into partnership and detailed to establish a branch house in a neighboring city. He was accounted the most thoroughly well-posted man on all matters of locality in his profession, and, indeed, was wont to boast that there was not a village in the State, comprising more than a chicken-coop and an empty tomato-can, in which he had not traded. From this friend I learned that there was a place called "Tatters," away in the mountains, almost on the borders of West Virginia.

There had been a sort of boom in West Virginia iron ore, and the D. and W. Railway had run a branch line across the mountains to tap the mining region. The new line had penetrated the heart of a wilderness, neglected since stage-coaching days, when an old turnpike had crossed into the transmontane by a gap, in which stood the village of Tatters. The settlement had dwindled to a cross-roads store, a blacksmith's shop, and half a dozen houses, and had not been deemed by the railway people of sufficient importance to justify a station and a regular agent. The trains would stop if they were flagged, or if they had goods or passengers to deliver, which did not often happen. Such local business as the company might acquire was intrusted to the village store-keeper, who also took charge of the infrequent freight.

This man, Sam Tatters by name, the drummer described as being a very square fellow; rather unsophisticated, as was natural, but shrewd in trade, and very honest and accommodating. Whether or not he had dealings with the "moonshiners" who infested the mountains there-away my friend could not say, but he admitted that the bar was good for so sequestered a spot, and the liquor innocent of adulteration.

That the name which Sam shared with his village should have originated "Tatters" seemed unlikely; but cognomens are plastic things, and, in rustic months, capable of variation and even of reconstruction.

The more I thought about it, the more probable it seemed that to this place that wagon of ours had wandered. The drummer to whom I related the misadventure was of my opinion, and the more because this mountain branch of the D. and W. was part of the same system as the trunk line on which the wagon had started. Telegraphic communication with Tatters was impossible, and my friend suspected that the storekeeper was no scribe, since "high larnin" was not a prerequisite to cross-roads store-keeping. The speediest way to reclaim our property, therefore, seemed to be to go after it.

In this view of the situation my employer concurred, and we arranged that he should give me the necessary time off for the management of the affair, and that I should pay my own and the wagon's expenses. This was satisfactory enough, and I departed on my mission in good spirits.

To a man who has been cooped up in town for more months than he can reckon on his fingers, a breath of the open air is a pleasant thing, even though it come to him through a car window. The lift of the country mountainward, the variation and ever-increasing beauty of the outlook, the blue of the sky, ribboned, toward evening, with clouds shaded from softest gray to delicate pink, like mother-of-pearl; even the fields of broom-sedge and scrub-pine, the brier patches and tangles of sumach and sassafras bushes, bound together with ropes of Virginia creeper and wild grape-vine, took on the beauty and allurement of the unaccustomed. I watched it pass in ever-varying panorama in a beatified state of enjoyment, which prevented even that tarnation wagon from rolling in on my memory and spoiling everything.

The journey occupied a good many hours, and it was somewhat over the edge of dark when we reached the village of Tatters. The train slowed up, deposited me on what looked to be the side of a ditch, and swept away with a wild toot-toot of exultation. There was no moon, and coming from the lighted car into the dimness of starlight blinded me, so that I stood and peered about, blinking like an owl abroad in daytime, but from a different cause. The ditch might be dry enough for passage, or it might not; the chance was even either way; and as my eyes grew accustomed to the dusk I fancied I could distinguish phantom-like poles and switches, which I took to be cat-tails and willow scrub. With the vision of a bog before my eyes I shunned unprecedented methods, and poked about for an authorized plank or crossing log. While thus engaged a voice from the other side of the ditch shouted out, "Hor-ree!" with a volume and suddenness that caused me to jump aside and well-nigh tumble into the danger I was seeking to avoid.

This Southern style of halloo, with its long-drawn cadence, was familiar to me; so I answered in kind, and proceeded in the direction of the voice. Presently a moving substance, distinguished from the general dusk by its density, appeared on the village side of the ditch, and held parley.

"Did the train put off anybody?"

"Yes."

"What sort?"

"A man."

There was a chuckling laugh, and then the voice went on:

"That war a fool question, warn't it? Arter I'd heard you holler, too. Your notes war keen as a kildee's, but thar war a man ring to 'em. What are you arter, anyhow, stranger, comin' in this time o' night?"

This I explained was the fault of the corporation, not of the individual. I further intimated that my first desire was to cross the ditch dry-shod, and after that to procure lodging for the night.

The explanation appeared satisfactory, and my interlocutor passed from inquiry to direction. There was only a thread of water at the bottom of the ditch, he said, but there was a plank across it further along. I might journey toward that, or expediate the transit by a "squar jump" from where I stood. The latter mode commended itself, and I crossed my Rubicon at once. The mountaineer, who had moved aside to give me landing room, chuckled again.

"You jump as keen as a catamount, stranger," he commented. "I e'en-er-most dodged double whenst your wind struck me. Look like ther darkness had bunched together an' flung forred."

At his invitation I followed him along a narrow path, which, after a few yards, merged into a country road. He had a store close by, he informed me, and would accomodate me for the night, since "thar warn't no boidin'-houses nor yet no hotels in ther gap."

"You are Mr. Tatters—Mr. Sam Tatters, I suppose." The observation savored of assertion, and was intended to help the acquaintance on to a sound basis.

"I reckon so." Then, with more assurance, "Yes, thet's me. How came you to ketch on to my name, seein' you be strange to these parts?"

I hastened to mention my own name and that of my friend the drummer, and by the time we had reached the store we had grown quite sociable and chummy. The building was a log structure, weather-boarded, and divided into a long room with shelves and counters containing the usual assortment of miscellaneous merchandise, and a smaller room at the back, in which were the proprietor's bed and a little railed-in space which served as a bar. There was a table in the middle of the room, already laid for supper, and in the great fireplace burned a noble fire of oak and hickory. As we entered, a negro woman came in also, through an outer door, with a dish of broiled birds and pot of smoking coffee. In compliance with my host's request, I took off my overcoat and made myself comfortable in the ingle nook. It was October still, but the nights were chill, and, in the mountains, cold enough for frost. After supper we drew to the fire, and the negro woman cleared off the table, lighted a dingy kerosene lamp, and departed. My host was a bachelor, he explained, and reduced to hire female attendance. He preferred his old corn-cob pipe to the cigar I offered him, and, for a time, we smoked in the ruminant silence which accompanies rustic consumption of tobacco after a full meal. To ears habituated to noise, the silence outside appeared almost unnatural; there was no wind astir, so that even the sound of its murmur among the trees was absent. My hearing, involuntarily strained for the relief of sound, grew painfully acute, and after a little I could distinguish the barking of dogs at a great distance. The expression of my face must have indicated intensity, for Tatters noticed it, and inclined his own ear, inquiring if I heard anything.

"Only dogs barking, away in the mountains somewhere," I made answer.

A slow smile wrinkled the corners of my companion's eyes and softened the curve of his lips. His face gained by the change of expression. It was a rugged face at best, with the aspect of having been roughed out and never finished; but the eyes were kindly, and there was about it something which inspired confidence. To drop into the vernacular, he looked like a man to tie to.

"Them's Ted Holly's dogs," he observed. "He mostly travels with two or three to heel, an' that thar big spotted hound o' his'n have got a ring to his voice whar's onmistable. Ted's comin' over ther mountain to see his sweetheart. She don't live more'n a mile from here. Thar weddin's got for Thu'sd'y week. Mensie have give in to marry him sence that thar wagon come an' helped 'em out'n ther mire some."

My attention was at once arrested, and the subject which had dominated my thoughts for days, held in abeyance for the nonce by physical comfort, trundled briskly to the front again. The name "Mensie" in connection with a wagon suggested discovery, and also complications. I hadn't conceived of the possibility of a woman being ticketed with a name so senseless until the initials given me by the man with the red mustache had jumbled into it. Here was a coincidence worth investigating. Before bursting into questions, however, I proceeded to put the matter in shape by briefly stating my business at home, and recapitulating the blunder which had necessitated my visit to this region. The attention with which my statement was received and the interest aroused by it might have been flattering could I have believed either evoked by anything personal. But my audience had no thought of me in the matter. His mind was filled with other images, and his expression was perplexed and decidedly regretful.

"What sort o' wagon did you say 'twas?" he queried when my tale was done.

I re-described it. He nodded twice or thrice, and beat with his pipe against his knee, as though making an inward comparison and checking off items.

"Did it come here?"

The question really appeared superfluous. I was convinced that it had

Tatters avoided a directed reply at first, and went over my description.

"Two-hors' wagon, mighty strong and serviceable, ironed heavy for rough travellin'; painted green, with red wheels, an' a red line around ther sides o' ther body. Had a patent brake too, an' things conformable. An' a kyard tacked on ther rump end o' ther tongue, marked to 'Miss Mensie Vane, Tatters.' That's so! Yes, siree! thar ain't no crawlin' round them facts. It's a pity too! Blamed if it ain't!"

I couldn't see it in that light. To me it was a matter of jubilation. My soul had been vexed within me because of that wagon, and my joy in its recovery was proportionately great. As delicately as I could I intimated that, to me, outside regret seemed superfluous. Then I demanded information as to the whereabouts of the property.

Tatters met my glance with a meditative sort of smile.

"Ride easy," he said. "Tain't far off an' you can't do nothin' with it to-night. It's safe enough, an' 'tain't dirtied none to hurt, I reckon. It come here week afore last; but sorter late—long about Friday or Sadday. Thar's been mo' mistakes about that wagon en what you made. Yours led off an' t'others followed suit. That's how come I'm so tarnation bothered."

A vision of our nice new vehicle mud-splattered and dingy arose before my mind's eye. There had been heavy rains the previous week, and for badness the mountain roads are proverbial. From the store-keeper's words I inferred that our wagon had been given opportunity to become acquainted with them. The impudence of some fellow's coolly hitching up and pranking about the country with our property, injuring and befouling it, made me hot all over. In a few forcible words I gave Mr. Tatters to understand that, as freight agent for the place, I intended to hold him responsible for damages. He had no business to let the property out of his keeping.

"I dun'no how come I hadn't," Tatters retorted, nettled in his turn. "Ther blamed thing war 'rected to 'Miss Mensie Vane,' plain as an axe helve, warn't it? An 'Miss Mensie Vane' lives just around ther shoulder o' the mountain, an' I sont her word ther wagon was here for her, an' she come over an' paid charges an' toted it off. If that warn't a straightforred transaction, I dun'no' one when I see it."

The way he put it certainly gave it that appearance. Here were complications with a vengeance, and a promising prospect for more delay and annoyance. It was bootless showing temper to Tatters, however, since he was, apparently, in no wise in fault. The better part of wisdom would be to possess myself of particulars, so that I might thereby regulate my future movements.

The story elicited was this:

About a mile distant, through the gap, there lived a family by the name of Vane, indigenous to the soil, and tracing occupancy of a sterile little hill-side farm back to the days of pioneering. By natural disintegration, brought about by thriftlessness in some of the race and enterprise in others, the family in these parts had dwindled down to an oldish man, maimed during the war, and gradually reduced to sightlessness by cataract on both eyes, a single daughter of eighteen, his youngest and sole remaining child, and a brood of grandchildren of tender years, the progeny of a son and daughter-in-law, both deceased. This John Vane appeared the very Murad of ill fortune. He was a weakly man in constitution, and never avid of exertion, and he had married a woman of mournful temperament. John was one of twins, and the rural superstition runs that should one of a pair of twins prove exceptionally successful, the average will be maintained by the other one's being unlucky. Jim Vane, the fortunate twin, had remained in lower Virginia after the declaration of peace, and settled in the tide-water region, where he had done very well for himself.

In his old home, this was known by hearsay, for, as years went by, the brothers had drifted more and more apart. They were both averse to what they denominated "ramblin," and being uneducated men, were debarred from intercourse by letter. They "sont word" to one another from time to time, and once Jim had come home on a visit. But that had been before his marriage, and John had never returned the civility, being tied at home by many cares and little stamina to to grapple with them.

His daughter Mensie seemed cast in in a different mould; doubtless one of those reappearances of the best in a race which usually presages a turn of the tide. From Tatter's account she was a handsome, high-spirited girl, with plenty of sense, plenty of pluck, and a loving heart of her own, to all of which the neighbors were willing to testify. After the death of her "slacktwisted" mother, a couple of years before, she had taken the family in charge and upheld them to the best of her ability.

That Mensie had a lover goes almost without telling, for, if a woman be tender hearted and loyal to her own, some man is sure to find it out and seek to appropriate the treasure. Ted Holly, the "likeliest fellow" in the district, according to Sam Tatters, had watched the girl at her gallant task and conceived the notion that it would be a pleasant thing to help her.

But Ted was as poor as a broom-sedge field, such patrimony as might have accrued to him, having been converted into liquor and poured down the throat of a vagabond father long ere he attained to manhood. He owned a horse, however, and a stalwart pair of arms, all of which he placed at his sweetheart's disposal. Mensie engaged herself right willingly, for she loved him well; but for that very reason she steadily refused to accede to his proposal to marry him straight out of hand. The man who should wed with her must assume the burden of her family, she said, and there were so many of them. She could not bring her mind to it all at once. After a while the children would be larger and could help themselves a little. They had better wait awhile.

Among their scanty possessions the Vanes owned a colt, now three years old and being broken by Ted to harness. Its dam had died soon after its birth, and Mensie had reared it on a bottle like a foundling infant. It was a sturdy, well-grown brute, and with Ted's sorrel formed as good a team as a man need want to shake his lines over. If only they could get a wagon now, Ted said, and Mensie would consent to marry him, their fortunes would begin to mend.

For with the opening of the ore banks across in West Virginia there had come a fine opportunity for making money. With a wagon and his good team, Ted figured out, he could made enough in a week, to support the family for a month. There would be no necessity to wait until natme should lift the children into self-support. Ted could take care of them all as easy as rolling off a log.

He hesitated about going in debt for the coveted vehicle; first, because he knew no man who would trust him for the purchase money, and then because he had observed that debts were prone to grow and devour a man's substance. His sweetheart dreaded debt, moreover, and held it a sorry foundation whereon to establish wedded happiness.

Then, just as their longing reached high-water mark, and the business opportunity seemed fairly to thrust itself upon them, this wagon of ours had come blundering along, marked with Mensie's name, and apparently intended for no other human being. Sam Tatters, who of course knew all about their plans and longings, being fond of them both, and moreover the repository for local gossip, was overjoyed at Mensie's luck. He sped a messenger in haste to summon the girl to behold this wonder, for he had no mind to deliver the wagon to any one else, and so lose the sight of her face when she should read the label. But Mensie had no grain of faith in a happening so unprecedented. It was one of Sam Tatters's foolish jokes, she said, for Sam was proverbial for jesting. She stuck to her spinning, therefore, and sent Ted Holly, who chanced to be on a visit to her, down to tell Sam that she was too wary a bird to be trapped with chaff. Holly, in no very credulous frame of mind himself, stepped along to the village with the message, and there to his wonderment beheld in Sam's store-yard a strong new wagon, as handsome as clean iron and paint could make it. He spelled out his sweetheart's name on the card fastened to the tongue, and then, with scarcely a word to Sam, leaped over the fence at the corner nearest the road and sped back through the Gap to fetch Mensie and the horses.

"He jumped up ther hill side like a hoppergrass," Sam narrated, "an' I don't b'leeve he tetched ground more'n every six foot, or such a matter. It's a steep hill-side, too, an' rough as the devil. Ted didn't keer, though. Lord bless you! he never knowed whether 'twas gravels or velvet under his boots, he was in such a swivet. In a little while he came back ag'in, an' Mensie with him. She was trimblin' all over like a wind-shook saplin' for joy. An' whenst she seed that thar wagon standin' thar as natu'l as preachin', an' read her name on ther tongue, an' 'lowed for certain 'twas hern, the tears come right up in her pretty eyes, an' she laid her head down on the highest hind wheel an' cried like a baby, an' maybe said her pray'rs over it, too, like women will when anything goes all over 'em. An' right then an' thar she told Ted he mout git the license as quick as he had a mind to, bekase this here wagon was agwine to haul the whole bilin' o' 'em out the ditch."

Tatters paused in his story, and gazed into the fire. I followed his example, and there was silence for a moment.

"They'd fetched the chil'un along, too; all seven o' 'em, stuck on the horses from neck to tail. Them leetle creeters dodged about like pa'tridges, so pleased to have a frolic an' ride home in the new wagon. I lent Ted some harness to help out with his'n, an' helped him hitch up. Most all ther folks had come out to see 'em start off, an' to pass jedgment on the wagon, an' rejice with Mensie over her luck. She's mightily thought of by the naybors, Mensie is. Whenst they started off, Ted holdin' ther lines as proud as a candidate whar have poled a majority, an' Mensie settin' up beside him so pretty an' satisfied, an' that coopful o' chil'un stored in behind, I 'lowed 'twas e'en-er-bout the happiest wag-onload I'd seed for a month o' Sundays."

He sighed as he ended. It seemed dreadful that this joy must be turned to mourning. I felt like a brute, but tried to harden my heart. After all, it was not *my* wagon.

"Did none of you suspect that there might be some mistake?" I questioned. "Whom did you suppose had sent the wagon?"

"Well, you see, thar was Mensie's Uncle Jim down the country. He is well off, an' we all know'd it. Ted an' I sorter figured out that the wagon come from Jim. I reckon 'twas his being John's twin made us pitch on him so straight. It looked natu'l for *twins* to help one another, an' seem like they ought to *feel* the right way to do it. Then, too, one of the neighborhood fellows had gone down to the low country a month befo' to see some kinfolks of his own, an' we 'lowed he mout have run across Jim an' told him about Ted an' Mensie. Everybody know'd what thar desire was. It looked sensible to think Jim sent it."

"Did his niece think so?"

"Who—Mensie? I dun'no' what she thought at fust. I don't b'leeve she thought nothin'. She was so broke all to pieces by the thing comin' to her so sudden, just in ther nick o' time, you may say, that she couldn't do much but rejice an' cry an' say her pray'rs over it. I axed her if she didn't reckon her Uncle Jim sont it, an' she just looked at me out'n them pretty eyes o' her'n an' made answer, right easy, like a person speaks in church, 'Maybe so; but I hadn't thought o' that. It looked to me like 'twar God A'mighty sont it.'"

My eyes sought the fire again, and I am not ashamed to confess that they saw double. The more I contemplated the job I had in hand the less I liked it, and the more inclined I felt to dodge it altogether. It seemed downright cruelty to take the girl's wagon from her. In my heart I regretted that Tatters was not still the *terra incognita* it had once appeared.

The fire had burned down to a bed of coals. Sam rose and laid fresh wood on it, and then passed into the outer room. I could hear him open and close a drawer, and shuffle about among the goods as though he were looking for something. Presently he came back and reseated himself beside the fireplace.

"It do look a pity to disapp'int her, now don't it?" he queried—"specially arter the thing had her name on it so plumb. I dun'no' how you come to run up agin thet name nohow. 'Tain't a common one, I reckon."

Certainly I had never heard it until I made that blunder in the address.

Sam pondered: "She 'lowed God A'mighty had took notice 'special," he mused. "Ef things turn out dif'ent 'twill feel 'most like He'd gone back on her, an' a notion like that would hurt a woman. They git a sight o' comfort out'n the idea that Providence have got a contract to look out fur 'em an' stands to fill it reg'lar." He lapsed into silence; then, with an abrupt change of voice and expression, turned to me with the question, "How much is the blamed thing wuth anyhow?"

"Sixty-five dollars was what it had sold for," I told him.

He reached down into his coat pocket and produced a small shot-bag, which he emptied on the table in front of him. It contained the month's accumulation of his cash drawer, in small notes and fractional currency. He counted it, replaced it in the bag, and pushed it over toward me.

"Thar's thirty," he announced, "and I'll send you the balance inside o' six months. The stock in t'other room will kiver it ten times over. I'll give you a lien on it tomorrow, seein' you don't know much about me. Is it a bargain?"

I stared at him. This summary disposal of the business flustered me. I explained that the wagon was not my property, nor even that of the firm I represented; that it belonged to a young woman down the country, who had paid her money and been kept out of her goods for a matter of six weeks.

"The firm won't keer," urged Tatters; "they'll be makin' by the trade. I'll take this stray wagon an' pay for it, an' they kin send t'other young woman another one. You all have got plenty, I reckon, as good as this, an' better. The young woman ain't never seed this one nohow. A wagen is all she's arter, an' so she gits a good one, and her money's wuth, she'll be satisfied. The firm will be rejiced—selin' two wagons 'stid o' one. Why, I shouldn't wonder if they put you on the road reg'lar arter this to drum for 'em." He laughed delightedly, and thrust the money over nearer to me.

Then his expression changed again.

"Ther thought o' that pore gal's satisfacton gittin' sp'iled gripes me," he affirmed; "it's hard luck to ketch holt o' happiness an' then have to turn loose. It's wuss'n if you hadn't never got in sight o' it. I'll fix up 'long o' Ted 'bout my money if you'll humor me. You kin look to me for your'n."

Sentiment is contagious, so of course he had his way. In truth I had no wish to arrange the matter otherwise. I knew I could make it all right with the firm by planking up the sixty-five dollars, and I did not mind making up the deficit and waiting on Sam Tatters. I knew I could trust him. As for the young lady, there were as excellent wagons in stock as this one, which could be shipped to her as soon as I got back.

My confidence in Sam was not misplaced, for before the expiration of the six months agreed upon the balance of the purchase money was paid over. It came down by express in another shot-bag, and was accompanied by a note from Tatters stating that Ted and Mensie had been married the week following my visit, and were well and happy, with good prospects of success in the hauling business. He and Ted had fixed up matters satisfactorily between them, but had agreed to keep the practical part of the matter a secret from Mensie. It pleased her so to call the wagon "a gift o' God."

And after all, perhaps, it had been.

Bill Nye's Love Song.

First Verse.

O my darling, O my darling,
Wilt you ever think of me?
For my darling, for my darling,
I will ofttimes think of thee.
And my darling, oh my darling,
When I ofttimes think of thee
It will be indeed a pleasure
If you erstwhile think of me.
Thus my darling, oh my darling,
Should you erstwhile think of me,
Whilst my darling, oh my darling,
I shall ofttimes think of thee,
We will think about each other
Till the bright eternity.

Second Verse.

It is fun to write a poem
While I pause to think of thee,
For I know you'll not forget me
While you pause to think of me.
Thus adown life's sunburnt pathway
Loiter I to think of thee,
For I hope and trust that also
You may sometimes think of me.

Third Verse.

It is not so very wearing
On the thinker, I can see,
Just to think of you, my darling,
As you doubtless think of me.
So, my darling, as I stated,
If your thoughts are true to me,
I will do some heavy thinking,
Oh my darling, just for thee;
And we'll think about each other
Till the bright eternity.

Yours truly,
BILL NYE.

—A one armed boy in Augusta saved four persons from drowning; but Dr. Bull's Cough Syrup has saved its thousands from consumption.

The use of highly seasoned animal food and alcoholic drinks are the predisposing cause of gout. When aware of its presence lose no time in procuring Salvation Oil. It kills pain. 25 cents.

—It is not good form to discuss the weather, but just now it is legitimate to justcuss it.

The Old-Style School Readers.

Any one who has heard the Bill Nye-Whitcomb Riley lecture will not soon forget his irresistible take-off of the old style of School Readers. Nothing could more quaint and inimitably droll than his manner of reciting the following, with his shrill, piping "Oh, sir," and like exclamations from the impossibly proper lad:

Sometimes a sad, homesick feeling comes over me when I compare the prevailing style of anecdote and school literature with the old McGuffey brand, so well known 30 years ago. To-day our juvenile literature, it seems to me, is so transparent, so easy to understand, that I am not surprised to learn that the rising generation show signs of lawlessness.

Boys to-day do not use the respectful language and large luxuriant words that they did when Mr. McGuffey used to stand around and report their conversation for his justly celebrated school reader. It is disagreeable to think of, but it is none the less true, and for one I think we should face the fact.

I ask the careful student of school literature to compare the following selection, which I have written myself with great care, and arranged with special reference to the matter of choice and difficult words, with the flippant and common-place terms used in the average school book of to-day:

One day as George Pillgarlic was going to his tasks, and while passing thro' the wood, he spied a tall man approaching in an opposite direction along the highway.

"Ah!" thought George, in a low mellow tone of voice, "whom have we here?"

"Good morning, my fine fellow," exclaimed the stranger, pleasantly, "do you reside in this locality?"

"Indeed I do," retorted George, cheerfully, doffing his cap. "In yonder cottage, near the glen, my widowed mother and her 13 children dwell with me."

"And is your father dead?" exclaimed the man, with a rising inflection.

"Extremely so," murmured the lad, "and oh, sir, that is why my poor mother is a widow."

"And how did your papa die?" asked the man, as he thoughtfully stood on the other foot a while.

"Alas, sir," said George, as a large, hot tear stole down his pale cheek and fell with a loud report on the warty surface of his bare foot, "he was lost at sea in a bitter gale. The good ship foundered two years ago last Christmas, and father was foundered at the same time. No one knew of the loss of the ship and that the crew was drowned until the next spring, and then it was too late."

"And what is your age, my fine fellow?" quoth the stranger.

"If I live till next October," said the boy in a declamatory tone of voice suitable for a Second Reader, "I will be nine years of age."

"And who provides for your mother and her large family of children?" queried the man.

"Indeed I do, sir," replied George in a shrill tone; "I toil, oh, so hard, sir, for we are very, very poor, and since my elder sister, Ann, was married and brought her husband home to live with us, I have to toil more assiduously than heretofore."

"And by