

The Conductor's Story.

I THINK it is Emerson who says: "When you pay for your ticket and get into the car you have to guess what good company you shall find there. You buy much that is not rendered in the bill." I have found this remark eminently true on several occasions, particularly when my life long friend Ruth bears me company.

Ruth is the most unconventional of women. She travels, as she does everything else, with whole-souled earnestness, and finds bread where most could gather only stones. Thus, recently being in the rear end of a long train, she preferred standing on the platform and drinking in at one draught the magnificent valley through which we seemed flying, than by tantalizing sips, as one has to from behind a narrow ear window. I followed her. I always do. And, holding on to the narrow railing, we felt somewhat like two comets whirling through space. Soon the door behind us banged, and a gentleman in the midsummer of life, with a face as classically beautiful as Edwin Booth's, and a waist of Falstaffian dimensions, joined us. He beamed on us almost literally. From the dimple in his fair, soft chin, to the ring of brown, silky hair which lay upon his broad, smooth forehead, the expression scintillated with intelligent good nature. Withal there was such a retrospective background to the sunny brightness that, after a few commonplaces, Ruth, the daring, honest, impudent creature, said, meanwhile looking up into his face with a smile so honest and kindly that he would have been a Berserker not to have reflected it:

"Sir, permit me to remark that you are a physical incongruity."

"Not so bad as that, madam, I hope. I am merely a conductor, as by this time you have discovered, and a pretty well balanced one independent of my avoirdupois."

"But your thoughtful face, sir, that is what perplexes me. It should belong to a body but one-third the weight of yours," suggested Ruth, the wise disciple of Lavater.

"My face is all right," he replied, stroking his cheeks and chin with an air of marvelous self complacency. "It stopped growing ten years ago, but it is here," touching the region of his diaphragm with the tip of his front forefinger, "that contentment and my rare good luck show themselves. Once I was as thin as Peter Shemmel's shadow, and—" he paused, looking into Ruth's clear, gray eyes as if he would sound her soul's depth—"I am strongly tempted to tell you my bit of romance, for there is a long stretch ahead, and you look like one of the kind to enjoy a touch of nature. Isn't it so?"

The conductor had struck the very key-note of our needs. We were pining for a veritable California story, told in an unconventional way, outside the well-read romances of Bret Harte and the Argonaut; to be told, too, under such peculiar circumstances would be an added spice, and thus we besought him to immediately yield to temptation.

"I am an old stager," he said, "at least as far back as the spring of '50. With a blanket strapped upon my back, fifty cents in my pocket and the biggest stock of hope and untried energy that ever made a lad's heart as light as a balloon, I tramped along here in my search for the 'gold diggings.' My ambition was higher than those buttes yonder by thousands of feet, and the top was to be capped with solid gold," pointing as he spoke to the three singular and isolated peaks we were just then passing, known as the Marysville Buttes, whose volcanic heights looked as inaccessible to us as their peaks seemed brown and barren."

"It appears to me," said Ruth, measuring the almost precipitous sides of those lofty and mysterious hills, "that when a man aspires to touch the sky he would want a higher guerdon than mere gold, not, however, that I hold the metal in contempt."

"I had madam, and that was the whole matter. I was desperately in love—that was a solemn fact expressed in as few words as possible—and I believe that she loved me, but the top of Mount Shaster was not more unattainable to me than Jennie. Her father, an old Philadelphia druggist, had money, and I had none. He was proud as Lucifer, and as ambitious for his daughter as he was proud. I felt that I could 'move a mountain,' if I could find a mountain to move; so Jennie and I said good-by one afternoon under an old oak in Fairmount Park, and in the very depths of heart I believed she would be true to me. It was not a seven days' ride in a palace car from New York to San Francisco those days, and the tall, slender, hungry, penniless lad who tramped along here twenty-nine years ago, seeking his fortune like another Dick Whittington, was a home sick and weary one as well."

"By 'here,' which you have twice

used, do you mean this veritable valley of the Sacramento?" asked Ruth.

"The very same. My objective point was a place now famous in the annals of that period, called 'Bidwell's Bar,' on account of a rich bar in the Feather river, full of golden sand, which was discovered by General Bidwell. The place was many miles from the country was sparsely settled. I did not know a soul (for even traps were scarce in those early days) and so my courage and my legs gave out together. Pulling off my boots about five o'clock one sultry day, I tared my blistered feet to the cool evening breeze, and creeping into a clump of young manzanitas, fell asleep, hoping that I would never again wake this side of the stars. I did, however, conscious that my toes were being licked in a gentle fashion, and discovered that it was being done by a young brown setter dog, about as hungry looking and generally dilapidated as I was myself.

"Where he came from I never knew, but looking into his half human eyes, we speedily entered into a sort of dumb compact to trudge on together. I found that the poor fellow (I never could call him a brute) had a sore knee, inflamed and bleeding. I tore a strip off from my last handkerchief to bind it up, and in place of the Good Samaritan's oil and wine, gave him my last scrap of cold bacon. It is strange, but forlorn as I was in those days, I recall them with a tender pleasure almost unaccountable. If I had been raised a Brahmin, I would have believed that some immortal spirit of unfailing cheerfulness and unending resources was imprisoned in that dog's body.

"Did you ever read the fairy legend of the 'White Cat,' who, after she had persuaded the young prince, her lover, to cut off her head and tail and throw them in the fire, suddenly stood before him a woman, as fair as Aurora? Fritz, for that was the name by which I called the dog, looked at me with Jennie's brown eyes, half roguish, half thoughtful, and together we resumed our journey. Nor would I have followed in the wake of the young prince, even if I had known the result would have been similar, for Fritz, the dog was invaluable just as he was. All lonesomeness was gone now that he rarely ever left my side, and although our shadows had grown less by the time we reached the 'Bar,' our immaterial entities were in prime order for anything in the shape of adventure. Have never seen any gold dug? Then I'll not at this late day spoil your first impression of a miner's camp by describing mine as I approached Bidwell's Bar. I may say though that one might have supposed an earthquake or tornado had just been at work there, tearing up the hundreds of thousands of cubic feet that had been moved and removed by mortal hands in their frantic and persistent search for gold.

"The 'Bar,' was a world in miniature. Almost every nationality was represented there, and almost every feature of human kind but humanity. Armed with a pick, pan and shovel, I like hundreds of others, began to dig and burrow and wash dirt. But my labor and its results would not balance, for somehow my little leather bag of gold dust grew no heavier, toil as I would. Wages being good I stopped digging and hired myself as a camp scullion. I did every kind of jobbing within range of a miner's wants.—Washing dirty flannel shirts and cotton overalls, patching leather trousers and cooking flapjacks is not the most dignified and flower-strewn path to fortune, you must know, and to a boy whose ideas of chivalry, independence and deeds of knightly valor were purely and intensely Byronic, such a fate you must acknowledge was a sort of poetic justice. My aim, though, was to earn enough money with which to buy a certain claim of which I knew, and that I had in advance labeled 'bonanza.'

"I might have succeeded, but I was prostrated by a malarial fever, and for days and weeks lay unconscious at the tender mercy of a few Welsh miners with human hearts. My little hoard of money and my energy melted away together like spring snow. But for Fritz I'd have died of disappointment alone. He had adopted the 'never say die,' motto, and I as often read in his glorious eyes the sentence: 'You great old coward. At him again?' as a tender and appreciative sympathy which the gift of speech could not have made more assuring. My nurses had pitched me a tent on the south side of a low hill, and left me to get well at my leisure.

"My bottom dollar had dwindled into the value of a dime, my legs into the thickness of a pair of tongs (for all appetite was gone), and one evening hope failed me. Believing I was going to die, I resolved to do the fair thing by Jennie, apprise her of the event, and advise her to forget me. By the flickering light of a bit of tallow candle, I commenced a letter—the first I had written for months. I thought aloud as

I wrote. Fritz lay beside me, his nose wedged in between his fore-paws, but I knew by the twitching of his ears that he understood every word I was writing.

"I had reached the climax of renunciation and wretchedness—or rather my expression of it—when he suddenly rose and went out. I soon heard him pawing and scratching and tearing the earth about six feet from me, as though he was under contract to dig a tunnel to China before daylight. Thinking he had found the burrow of a wolf or fox, I called him off, but he was as deaf as a rock to my voice. Seizing the candle I hurried to the spot, around which lay a half-bushel of gravel, which he had loosened, when my eye caught the gleam of a dull red streak that stained a quartz about the size of an egg, lying among the fresh earth. Would you believe it? That streak was worth fifty dollars, for it was virgin gold. Nor was it the only one upon the hillside. Fritz had found a lode (thanks to a gopher), and I, thereby, had found a fortune. As soon as possible I had the gold of that first precious stone wrought into a ring of my own designing; all of it, at least the contents of but one blunt corner, which, in native roughness, I mounted as a simple brooch. Sending these to Jennie I—"

"An act of great generosity, sir, I think," interrupted Ruth, with a laughing glint in her eye. "One would have thought you'd have preserved such a piece of rare good fortune as a memorial stone."

"You anticipated me, madam. It was as a memorial that I sent my first bit of treasure, but I expected to get it back at the end of two years, and the girl with it."

"And did you?"

"No; nor even received a line of acknowledgment that my offer had been accepted. Nothing finds gold quicker than gold when a man has once got a fair share of it, and in two years I had, in various ways, secured twenty thousand dollars. Investing it, as I thought, safely, I returned to Philadelphia in all the pride of a conquering hero. My story ought to end here; wind up with the chime of wedding bells and a beautiful Rachel, as my reward for faithful serving, but I had scarcely arrived when I heard accidentally that Jennie had gone with her father to Europe, nor left one sign that she had ever remembered me."

"You certainly did not let that fact dampen the ardor of your pursuit," queried Ruth; "you followed her, of course?"

"Of course I did no such thing, madam. I returned to San Francisco and plunged into the excitement of gold hunting with a recklessness that a woman cannot understand. Six months after I had lost every dollar, but, by that time, I had learned that experience is worth nothing as solid capital until it has been dearly bought. I whistled my rhyme:

Loss and gain, pleasure and pain
Balance the see-saw of life.

In the sensitive ears of my faithful Fritz, hugged his brown head close to my shoulder—don't laugh, that dog was my friend—rolled up my sleeves and again went to work with a vigor that I knew meant success if the vein held out. It did, and five years afterwards I had a bank account which ran largely into the thousands. I invested it in land. Hard knocks and my big disappointment had shaken all the romance out of me, and when I again went East it was on business connected with the construction of this railroad."

"And you had quite lived out your boyish fancy, as your heart began to lose its youth?" asked Ruth, with the least bit of cynicism in her tone.

"I think Fritz knew," said the conductor quietly. "I had become almost a misanthrope for his sake. If I left him to go into society—such as we had—for a few hours, he either whined like a sick child or kept up such an incessant barking and baying that, to save him from being shot as a nuisance, I went to no place where it was impossible for him to accompany me. The old fellow went with me even to New York, and on the journey I often found myself cogitating as to how he—born in a wilderness of wild mustard, and as fond of camp-life as an Indian—would take to the constraints of an old city. Well, I had not been in New York a week before there was a strong tugging at my heart to run down to Philadelphia. Not that it was home for me, for my parents had died before I had first left it. I called the desire, 'the charm of association,' and it led me to decide at once to run over to the Quaker City.

"There, as I first went down Arch street, my poor dog lost his wits and the sober dignity of his maturity. He had a remarkably fine scent. I always knew that; but no sooner had we turned into that particular street, than, with nose close to the ground and rigid tail, he ran zig-zag to and fro, as though he was on the trail of an erratic fox. I

called to him but he gave no heed. People got out of way. The gamins shouted, and, with a wild, shrill bark, he bounded into the doorway of a large dry goods store. I bounded after him in time to see him rush up to a lady in black who was examining some gloves and dance around her with signs of the most extravagant joy. There are tones that live without the aid of phonographs. 'Roy! Roy! Dear old Roy!' was all she said, but I'd have sworn the voice was Jennie's, if I had heard it on the summit of Mount Blanc. A white hand was laid upon his head, and my ring was on the hand."

He paused. "Yours? Sir, I hope you did not claim it," said his practical collocation.

"I did, and the hand which wore it, just as I had originally intended."

And Alexander in his hour of greatest conquest, never smiled a more serene approval of himself than our conductor at this stage of his story.

"But the conduct of Fritz and the lady's silence, and the queer concomitants which exist only in fiction—how do you reconcile them with an 'ow'r true tale?" said Ruth, the truth-loving.

"Fritz was Roy, the Roy who had often been caressed by Jennie before his young master, Jennie's cousin, got the gold fever when I did, and came to California never to return. Jennie had written but her letter never reached me. She thought me dead. Why the dog came to me when his master died, is one among the riddles of my life which I will disentangle in the hereafter."

"And to-day where is she?"

He stood waiting for the question.

"On our ranch near Sacramento, and I believe one of the happiest women in the State. We have a boy ten years old whose name is Fritz, and all the dearest for the sake of the old friend who has long since gone where I hope some day to meet the human of him. I wish you could stop off a while and see my wife. Queer, isn't it, that I should have intruded this bit of private history upon you, but the truth is—Yes, coming, I'll be with you again, ladies."

A brakeman beckoned him inside, and we had seen the last of our handsome conductor.

The evening shadows had begun to lengthen. The setting sun had turned the vast plain of the Sacramento valley into a "field of the cloth of gold," and the distant peaks of the Sierra, clad in their eternal snows, but now rose-tinted and glowing, seemed to cleave the azure above them as with a wedge of burnished silver. It was starlight when we reached the end of our ride and were registered for the night.

"The conductor's story was a pleasant little episode, Ruth, wasn't it? Do you believe it hollow?" I asked, as I leaned from my pillow to hers to leave a good-night kiss on her round cheek.

"I like Fritz," was her sleepy answer. "There's an instinct about some dogs that the half of mankind can neither appreciate nor attain. I trust a man whom a good dog loves."

Very Precise.

In noting the difference in the style in which Senators and Representatives now live in Washington as compared with that usual thirty years ago, an old resident tells an anecdote of interest. He says that at that time it was not uncommon for very worthy members of either House of Congress to occupy rooms over stores. A very well gentleman was elected to Congress, whom we will call Baker, and he set up a grand establishment here. He was greatly shocked to find that his intimate friend Cooper, although a very rich man, lived over a grocery store, and one day, in addressing a note to him, wrote: "Hon. Mr. Cooper, over Smith's grocery store." But Cooper was not to be put down thus, so, remembering the situation of Baker's grand house, when he answered addressed his letter: "Hon. George Augustus Baker, opposite Foy's livery stable."

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ALBERT E. RICHMOND,

CHAS. H. SMILEY, Att'y. Administrator.

May 10, 1881.