

A SHEEP IN WOLF'S CLOTHING

The pull is uphill for almost three miles along here, and the horses plod along slowly. The dust is just as deep; but now, instead of blowing off to leeward, as it did a while ago, it hangs close around the stage in a thick, dense, reddish-yellow cloud, almost shutting off the view from the passengers inside, it they cared to look out. But the beauties of nature hold their interest only slightly, just at present. The dust occupies their attention to a large extent. It fills their mouths, and eyes, and nostrils, and clings to their hair and eyes in much profusion. It is disagreeable; very; and the man who has enough spirits left to try and keep up the conversation is voted an ass by his fellow-passengers. They were all very friendly only a short time ago; but they hate each other with a bitter hatred just now—all on account of the dust. Dust is a great destroyer of good humor.

But there, a mile or so, the sun shines brightly on the canyon road, making it look like a long, yellow ribbon; but just ahead the shadow of the mountain on the west, which seems to close the upper end of the pass, cuts the light off in an odd, abrupt way, and presently we shall be in comparative darkness, for the edge of the heavy timber is only a little distance before us.

Somehow, the dust doesn't rise very high, or else the driver, and the passenger on the box don't mind it, for we can hear them talking. Old Ben, through some unseen but easily imagined influence, has relaxed from his usual taciturnity, and is quite communicative to the bearded, boyish-looking young chap who got on back at Alpha and is sharing the box with him.

As the stage reaches the level and rolls into the shadows of the mountain and the tall pines, Ben points with the whip to the mouth of the narrow pass leading out of the canyon a quarter of a mile away, and remarks:

"See them two big rocks?—road runs b'tween em. Uh-huh. Wal, right that—mebbe a couple rods 'r so further on—was whar I was held up one day in th' summer of '76."

"Yes?" said the passenger's pleasant voice, interrogatively. "Would you mind telling me about it?"

Ben chirped to his horses, spat impressively and literally, and began:

"Wal, twuz this a way. That mornin' th' xpress box was loaded plumb full o' hard stuff, th' hed t' go through that day. Now jes' lue'd hev it, one o' th' gards—'we hed gards them days—turned up missin' 'bout th' time we was ready t' start fr'm Eldorado in th' mornin'. Berry McNeill, th' other gyard, goes arter 'im, an' fin' Mr. Man laid up with a gash in th' 'ead fr'm a beer bottle—be'n scrapin' nigh't b'fore."

"Th' agent an' me was thinkin' pow'ful 'bout who we'd git t' take Hauser's place if he was sick, w'en hyar comes Mac, whistlin'."

"Say, fellers," says he, "Hauser got plunked with a bottle las' night, an' is layin' on his downy couch with a headache. Reckon I c'n go it b' my lonesome; I got Hauser's sawed-off gun."

"We bowed kicked a whole lot, but Mac, we'd made up his min', an' was boun't hev his own way; s'ides, we didn't hev no one right handy t' go 'long, so we hed t' give in, an' Mac, whistlin' one o' his ever-lastin' tones, piles up on th' box, an' we pulls out. They wa'n't no passengers."

"Wal, we kep' our peepers skun right sharp, but ev'rythin' went lovely till jes' long 'bout hyar. Then Mac says: 'Ben, I b'lieve they's some cusses layin' fer us up b' them rocks—I think I seen a feller's head, jes' now.' Says I: 'Mac, y're full o' hop. I seen it too, an' 'twan't nothin' but a hawk, crossin' the road.'"

"I stirred up the critters a bit, howsom-ever, but jes' we turned th' rocks, somebody jumps out s'm' both sides an' nails th' leaders, an' they was so many guns starin' intuh my face th't it made me ashamed o' myself. Mac cut loose w' th' sawed-off-shot-gun, an' then begun w' th' Winchester, gittin' two fellers an' skinnin' up some more—but they was too dern many o' em an' they o'd shoot too, so Mac he never got no chance t' pump that gun dry. He oughtn't t' hev shot, no-how, but he allus was a nervy cuss—more nerv'n sense. I useb say, 'Mac—"

Half a dozen dusky forms leap from the roadside—the big cowboy who got aboard early in the afternoon, and has been dozing and swearing in an uneasy way about the dust, is suddenly wide awake, and we, on the inside, get a good look at the muzzle of his two big revolvers—we hear Ben ejaculate, "Wal, this do beat hell!"—and then we are invited to get down into the road, where the pleasant-faced, boyish-looking young man, who got on back at Alpha, proceeds to business, and politely, courteously, but firmly, withal, relieves us of our spare change—and more, too.

That is my part of the story. Of course, there were quite a number of other people present, including the youthful highway-man and his capable assistants, and they also have a claim on the above narrative. I did not mean that I owned it; what I tried to say was that that is the only one of the events from which comes this veracious tale that I took part in, and I think it has been shown that my part was entirely a passive one. Perhaps we had better call that portion of the story the gentlemanly road-agent's, because he got about everything else there was to be got. The rest is Hallegan's.

Hallegan and I were travelling together, and it was his foresight—or, rather, an odd notion of his—that enabled us to resume our journey to Denver after the road-agent incident. This odd notion was in the form of a thin chamois issole, which he wore in his left boot, and which in addition to a card giving directions for the disposition of his body in case he should suddenly be called hence while among strangers, contained a fifty-dollar bill. It was an ordinary fifty-dollar bill, but when Terence flashed it before my dazzled eyes in the hotel at Merrill that night, I was quite sure that it was larger and more valuable than the opinions of a New England hired man. It took us to Leadville, anyway, and that was all we could reasonably desire.

But for the rest of the story: It was about two years after the road-agent affair, in which we lost almost

everything but our good names and the clothing we wore, when, one day, I was thunder-struck to receive Hallegan's wedding-cards. It was the first time I had heard from him for a year, and had any one else told me Terence Hallegan was a marrying man, I should have derided him; but when Terence himself, in his own peculiar chirography, directed to me an envelope containing such startling news, all set forth in the highest style of the engraver's art—well, it was too much, and I went down into the camp, where surcease of sorrow was obtainable in quantities to suit the purchaser, and where there were a full score of Terence's friends and acquaintances to toast his memory and console with each other. And grief was our lot, until the day Jewett "struck it" in that hole he had been pegging away at, over on the other side of the gulch, and excitement reigned supreme.

In the midst of confusion, telegrams came and went, flying—brought and sent by special courier to and from the office at Sunrise, nine miles away; and one day came one for him who sits here burning the nocturnal kerosene. It was from Hallegan, who was now living in Chicago, and summoned me to hasten to that city, where I was needed to assist in closing a transaction involving the sale of some mining property in which Terence and I were interested.

Terence met me at the station. He looked remarkably well, even for a person whose health and spirits had always been of the very best, and I told him so, adding that in dependent opinion he must have drawn a capital prize in the matrimonial lottery.

He smiled happily and took my arm to walk outside the train enclosure, as he said: "That I did—that I did, my boy; just wait till you see her, and you'll be sure of it."

He called a cab, gave the driver some brief instructions, and leaped in after me. We rode several minutes in silence; then Hallegan turned to me in a rather embarrassed way, and said, in a strained tone: "Billy, me boy—it's very near dinner-time at our house—and there's no time for explanations. Only—if you think you've seen—my wife—if her face is familiar—please don't mention it, or act as though you noticed it. I'll explain after dinner."

I acquiesced wonderingly, and wondered yet more after I had met Mrs. Hallegan, for I was quite positive that I had never seen her before, and there was ample opportunity during the course of the excellent dinner we presently sat down to, to study her. She was slightly above the medium height, and of a perfect, though rather slight figure. Her hair and eyes were dark, setting off excellently her clear olive complexion, and her features were all that an artist could desire. She was hardly what one would call a beautiful woman, however. "Handsome" would be the better word—or, perhaps, "striking." There was something about the firm set of her mouth when not speaking, and the strong, rather masculine chin—in which, oddly enough, there was a charmingly feminine dimple—that caused this effect, I think. One would never have taken Mrs. Hallegan for the daughter of the little, white-haired, sweet-faced old lady who sat opposite me, and whom she addressed as "mother."

"No, I had never seen her up to half an hour ago, so I gave up studying her and fell to wondering what Hallegan was going to explain."

Dinner over, the ladies rose to leave us, smiling over the broad hint Terence had just thrown out concerning a desire to smoke. As they reached the door, Mrs. Hallegan turned and bowed mockingly to her husband, whose hand was just reaching for the bell. "I hope, Sir Terence, that the cigars may prove dry company."

Then, with a bright smile, she vanished. I dropped into my chair breathlessly. Where had I seen that mocking bow? Then, suddenly, there came before that little scene in the mountains two years since; the dust, the heat, the sleepy cowboy inside the coach, the dapper little chap who so politely took our money and watches. He bowed just that way when he finished his work and departed. "Her brother," I thought—"black sheep, blot on family escutcheon. How much they resemble."

"Well, me boy?" Hallegan was looking at me quizzically through the smoke, we having lighted our cigars meanwhile. I suppose I looked embarrassed. Of course it was all rot; the idea of there being any connection, however remote, between the stately creature who had just left us and the little rascal who engineered that hold-up!

Hallegan spoke: "Billy, me boy, I won't make a short story any longer than is necessary. You remember the little fellow who held us up, two years ago?"

"Of course I do."

"Yes, very likely. Well, I fancy I'd better begin at the beginning. "Three years ago, a young fellow named Wilson, who had been employed as cashier by the L. and A. Stage and Express Company, got into trouble over his accounts. The manager—Robinson—charged him with a shortage amounting to several thousand dollars. There was an investigation, and, on the strength of certain circumstantial evidence which need not be stated, as it is immaterial, backed by the testimony of Robinson, the manager, Tweedy, the superintendent, and Frank Robinson, son of the manager—who, by the way, had always been Wilson's bosom friend—the cashier was convicted on trial and sentenced to a long term at Canyon City. Strange to say, he offered no testimony and made no defence except the plea of 'not guilty.'"

"Well, it killed him. Inside of a year, the worry and disgrace, along with the hard work and close confinement—he had never been very strong—had wasted him to a shadow, and when, at last, he knew he couldn't live very long, he sent for his mother and sisters to come to him."

"His mother was too ill herself to travel, and one of the sisters—a cripple—was obliged to remain with her, but the elder sister went."

"She found him dying—dying in prison. It was the first she had known of his trouble and, naturally, she was terribly shocked."

"He told her the true history of the affair—that young Robinson, between whom and himself had existed a sort of

Damon and Pythias friendship, was the guilty one; and how, when some of the stockholders got wind of the shortage, the two Robinsons and Tweedy, who was a brother-in-law of old Robinson, had conspired to shield the guilty man by sacrificing an innocent one, who would not defend himself. The confession made by the dying man was not altogether a voluntary one. His sister, who had known nothing except that he was innocent, caught a hint of the truth from him when he was raving in delirium—the rest she made him tell her."

"After young Wilson's death, his sister went quietly to work to see what could be done to prove her brother's innocence, and to place the guilt where it belonged, but soon found that nothing could be proved. The Robinsons were too strong for her."

"About this time Mrs. Wilson and her younger daughter were obliged to go south on account of ill health, leaving the elder daughter, who was studying medicine, here in Chicago. Not long after this, the hold ups on the different lines of the L. and A. began. For the first few times, there was only one road-agent—a little chap, but a nervy—who got talked about by the papers a good deal; but pretty soon there were others, until a band of about eight or nine had organized, under the little fellow's leadership, and they made life a burden to the L. and A. people. It made no difference what precautions the company took, or how many guards it employed; the road-agents were too smart, and the boldest kind of hold-ups were successfully made—and, by Jove! it 'busted' the company's business."

The L. and A. wasn't a heavy concern, of course, but had always made a good deal of money. The frequent hold-ups on its lines, though, proved a settler. It wasn't long before nobody would ship or travel over any of the L. and A. company's lines unless actually obliged to do so, and the company was kept pretty busy settling the losses of its customers. Then came the crash, and somehow people began to suspect that the Robinsons had not run things as they should have been handled, and the stockholders shortly afterward, Old Robinson died in disgrace, shortly after that. The young man took all he could lay his hands on and skipped, but was caught at Santa Fe. He's where he should be—at Canyon City. Tweedy got off on a technicality."

"About seven or eight months after we were held up, a stage stopped and relieved one afternoon, about ten miles from Milliken, in the old Muleshoe Trail. The young fellow was one of the robbers—I knew him in spite of his mask. There were only four of the road-agents on this occasion."

"They pulled out leaving us orders not to touch our arms (which they had stacked on the ground) for twenty minutes, under penalty of getting shot. But one of our party was a devil-may-care chap, and no sooner were the bandits gone than he walked right over to the pile of guns and picked his out, remarking that he 'didn't believe there were any road-agents around just then.' And there weren't."

"Well, the result of this fellow's foolhardiness was that we concluded it would be money in our pockets to get on the trail of those four road-agents, so we started after them, separating a little distance from each other. We followed them the whole afternoon, but couldn't find a trace."

"You know how the old Muleshoe Trail is? Well, the driver had gone on, agreeing to meet us on the other side of the Shoe—it is only three or four miles across. I was just about making up my mind to join the other fellows, and had stopped to think of the best way to cross the creek, when I heard a queer sound, like a woman sobbing. I looked cautiously around, and there, within two rods of me, was the young road-agent, crying as if his heart would break. There was no one else there; it was plain to be seen, so I quietly sneaked up and requested him to throw up his hands."

"Did you ever hear a woman scream at the sight of a mouse? That's just the way this young fellow screamed when he saw the muzzle of my gun—and I, as soon as I saw the scared, tearful face turned to mine, knew as well as I know now, that the famous bandit known as 'Foxy' was only a woman."

"She seemed to trust me somehow, and pretty soon I had the whole story from her. Then I sat down and talked to her like a brother; and the result was that next day the road-agents missed their leader, and, inside of a fortnight, Miss Jean Wilson was back here in Chicago, at her studies again."

"I need not say that this gentle bandit, who ruined the business of the L. and A. Company, took not one cent of the proceeds, and never permitted any of the band to interfere with Uncle Sam's mail. The latter fact accounts, in a measure, for their success, for Uncle Sam is a bad man to interfere with. The former fact, I think, had to do, to some extent, with the strong hold which 'Foxy' had over her subordinates, although they must have had a good deal of faith in his demonstrated ability as an executive. The band was broken up not long after 'Foxy's' disappearance, and three of the men were caught, but they didn't know any more concerning their mysterious ex-chief than did the public at large."

"And—Miss Wilson is—"

Hallegan's eyes twinkled: "Is waiting for us. Let us join her," he said.—Ex.

A Royal Betrothal.

In referring to the death of the Grand Duke of Hesse, on March 13, an English paper gives the following extract from the queen's diary, bearing on the betrothal of the duke to Princess Alice: "After dinner, whilst talking to the gentlemen, I perceived Alice and Louis conversing before the fireplace more earnestly than usual, and when I passed to go to the other room, both came up to me, and Alice, in much agitation, said she had proposed to her and he begged for my blessing. I could only squeeze her hand and say 'certainly,' and that we would see him in our room later. We got through the evening work as well as we could. Alice came to our room . . . agitated but quiet . . . Albert sent for Louis to his room, went first to him, and then called Alice and me in . . . Louis has a warm, noble heart. We embraced our dear Alice, and praised her much to him. He pressed and kissed my hand, and I embraced him. After talking a little, we parted, a most touching and, to me, most sacred moment."

A MAGNIFICENT APRIL FOOL.

Entertaining Chapter in the Life of Maestro Rossini.

A centenary is a very grand thing, no doubt; but few people hanker after it. If Rossini takes any interest in the thing just now he might request his admirers to "whistle it easy." Above the din of the orchestra we find some bass notes that the author of *William Tell* would perhaps like to have omitted. They inform us that the great composer was what the French call *un homme de bonnes fortunes*, or at least he imagined himself such. He was thoroughly convinced that he was irresistible among the ladies. As a New Yorker might say, vulgar but expressively, he was "stuck on himself." He kept his pockets well stocked with *billets doux*, which he constantly exhibited to his less fortunate friends and acquaintances. In a word, if the notes which his centenary have called forth are all in tune the great maestro was an ass. Here is one of them from his biographer, Ettinger.

At Milan one morning just as he got out of bed Rossini received the following note: A lady just arrived from Naples, with the intention of making the acquaintance of the maestro whose music fills the entire globe and carries his renown everywhere, would wish to see him this evening at the Scala, box 9, lower tier, to tell him orally what she dare not put on paper.

The letter was written in a fine and elegant hand. There was a crest on the envelope, and the whole affair was exquisitely scented. "Another conquest!" sighed Rossini with an air of profound resignation. Just then the door was opened and the tenor David appeared. David was a first-class practical joker. The composer and the singer chatted pleasantly for a while, after which the latter announced the news that the Ambassador of France had just arrived at Milan.

"Is she pretty?" asked Rossini. "She is simply adorable," replied David, "and she is just crazy over your music. Her very first act was to hire a box for this evening. I was at the theatre when her attendant arrived and he hired a box in the lower tier."

"Do you know the number?" asked Rossini. "Number nine, I think," was David's reply.

That settled it. When David went away Rossini prepared himself with a most elaborate toilet. He curled his hair, fixed himself up elaborately, put on his all-conquering trousers, and when it was time to start for the theatre he set off with a light heart for box 9. He found it empty. But he waited patiently, or rather, impatiently, for the arrival of the expected beauty. At the end of the third act the box door was gently opened and an unknown hand presented Rossini with this note:

MY DEAR MASTER: Madame the Ambassador of France has charged the undersigned to offer you her apologies. It is impossible for her to come to the theatre for the following reasons:

I.—She has not yet left Rome.

II.—She will probably never come to Milan.

III.—She doesn't exist. The Ambassador of France is a widower.

Be good enough, incomparable maestro, to accept the assurance of the profound esteem with which the undersigned has the honor to be

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Rossini swore. He was an April fool! He tried to laugh it off, but ever afterward David's notes were always out of tune with the great composer.

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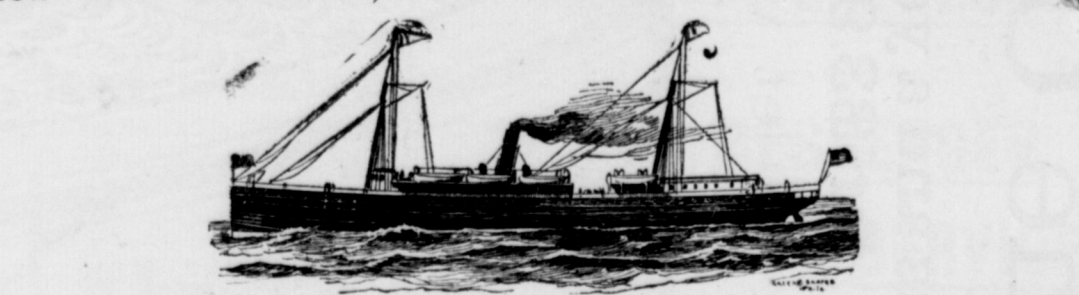
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