

ALLEN GRAY;

- on -

The Mystery of Turley's Point

Being a Few Romantic Chapters
From the Life of a Country
Editor.

BY JOHN R. MUSICK.
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LAKEMAN," "BANKER OF BEDFORD"
AND OTHER STORIES.

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CHAPTER I. THE FIRST ISSUE.

In the midst of those verdure-crowned hills on the banks of the Missouri, nestled among the dales and forests, like a timid thing wishing to hide from the busy world, is a small village, which, for sake of convenience, we will call Turley's Point. It is a river town, and yet the river can be seen from its streets; and many times the boats which still occasionally plow that muddy stream pass by without catching a glimpse of the dull, sleepy little hamlet. The town is in a valley, or rather lap of land, among high hills, with just a narrow, oblique opening between two ridges, revealing the broad bosom of the river to view, and is one of the quietest places in the whole world. A small brook glides by the village, with just murmur enough to lull one to repose; and from the streets the notes of the quail can be heard, accompanied by the tap-tap of the woodpecker, just as they were a century before the foot of the white man trod their sacred haunts.

Turley's Point was in a state of helpless decay. Long before the days of railroads, it being a steamboat landing, seemed to evince some signs of prosperity, and had grown and thrived, but when the railway began to usurp and absorb river navigation, Bentonton, a rival town eight or ten miles below, having secured one of these modern highways of traffic, began at once to prosper at the expense and detriment of Turley's Point. Men having business interests at the latter place adopted various means to rouse the drooping energies of the Point, but their most herculean efforts could not generate even an embryonic boom. Slowly but surely it was going down, and unless something was done to revive its business interests it was only a question of time when the village would be entirely deserted.

"We must advertise, we must advertise," Tom Simmons, an ambitious politician and property owner, often declared. The question of advertising was given serious consideration by the leading citizens of this moribund village. After mature deliberation, it was decided that Turley's Point must have a weekly newspaper, which was to be a rival of the Bentonton *Gazette*. Tom Simmons was appointed one of a committee of two to find a suitable person to manage such an institution, and in a few weeks reported that by making some donations to the enterprise, they could secure a young man with some experience and capital, who was willing to undertake the precarious business of establishing a paper at Turley's Point.

Early one summer morning one of those lonely steamer, which still occasionally wander up the Missouri, like the ghost of its former glory, sounded the whistle and rang the bell when opposite the Point, and gracefully swung into the landing. The stage-plank was thrown out, and a young man about four or twenty years of age walked ashore. It was Mr. Allen Gray, the prospective editor of the new paper. He was bringing his press, cases, chairs, rules, forms, type, and all the manifold paraphernalia of a country printing office with him. Tom Simmons was at the landing to meet the new editor, who was to review Turley's Point and bring back its pristine glory. While the stout hands were carrying the press, cases, form of type and boxes ashore Tom had taken the new editor's arm and was conducting him up the ascent to the village, all the while commenting on the golden opportunities that awaited the new enterprise.

To Allen the prospect seemed anything but encouraging; he was young and full of hope, and determined to make a vigorous battle for a position in the Western world. "This is your office," said the valuable Mr. Simmons, as they passed in front of an old, dilapidated building, which had at one time been used as a general store. "There is plenty of room here for your presses and every thing. This is the boat we can do now, but when your business grows, you know, we can build an office to suit it."

By this time the news had spread all over the village that the new editor had arrived, and the little town, for the first time in years, took on something like excitement. Toney Barnes hastened to the building which was to be the newspaper office, for an introduction, and as soon as it was possible for him to do so, secretly informed the new publisher that he was a poet, and would have one of his effusions in the very first issue of the new paper. Allen hadn't been long enough in the newspaper business to feel the thrill of horror which an older editor would at coming in contact with a poet. Then Miss Leathy Hopkins, the ancient maiden, was next to seek an introduction, and around the new publisher with the fact that she was a versatile writer. She wrote stories, "poems in rhyme or blank verse," tragedies, comedies, essays, and, in fact, every thing from an epigram to a humorous paragraph. Miss Hopkins devoted her leisure hours, when not engaged in literary work, to teaching the village school. She was tall and slender, her nose was on the Hebraic plan, but small eyes seemed to glint triumphantly through her glasses, as she astounded the new editor with her multifarious accomplishments.

Nothing could be done that day except get the press and material into the building, which was to serve as office, press-room, composing room and general storage and mailing-room. A table at the front entrance was to serve as the editor's desk, and he had three chairs and one bench dedicated him by the good officers. That afternoon several of those persons who had dedicated names to the new enterprise met the editor in his office to discuss the future of the proposed publication.

"The first thing to be decided is a name," said Tom Simmons, decidedly leaning on the table.

"I have a name to propose," said Toney. "It's the 'Emissary'."

"I might be led to gravely consider all above," the new proprietor smiled. The name would certainly not be a telling one, but Tom Simmons, who had political ambitions, said:

"That's all right, Toney; let's call it Turley's Point."

No, "gasped Mr. Strong, another capitalist, who had donated fifteen dollars

to the concern; "that'll not do at all. Better not give it a name that's liable to be political paper. This is to be an independent organ, for the upholding of Turley's Point, and we must be very careful what name we give it."

"What'd you suggest, George?" asked Simmons.

"The 'Star of Turley's Point'."

"Or the 'Turley's Point Star' would be more euphonious," put in the poet.

"Neither of those are suitable," said the new publisher.

"Call it 'Turley's Point Express,'"

suggested Strong.

Objects, however, were found to stat.

Then Mr. Simmons, whose ambition soared out beyond the narrow confines of Turley's Point, suggested that some broader name be chosen.

"Don't have Turley's Point in it at all," he said. "Call it by some name that will go all over the West, and bring in glory to Turley's Point."

This seemed sensible, and a hundred inapplicable titles were at once suggested, but almost instantly discarded. At last the new editor was appealed to as the proper person to name the paper, it being his idea.

"If you want a general name, one euphonious, and at the same time dignified and sweeping, call it the 'Western Republic'!" he said.

The name seemed to suit every one. Toney Barnes thought it especially poetic; Miss Hopkins, who was present, declared it romantic. It was sufficiently broad for the expanding ambition of Mr. Simmons, and practical enough to suit the capitalist Strong, therefore the *Western Republic* was agreed upon. Allen selected from the large display wood type on hand the heading, with the aid of the foreman, Leo Hatchett, and printers' devil, Toby Smith, he proceeded to put the offices in shape. The villagers crowded in the room and about the windows to gaze in astonishment at the imposing stones, the cases, fonts of type, hand press and "gopher," wondering what was "going" to be done with all them things."

Next day every thing was in shape ready for business. The editor had clipped some appropriate articles from the few exchanges which he had induced the publishers to send him in advance, and the foreman was putting them in type. Toby, the apprentice, was standing on a box in order to be high enough to reach the case, with a stick in his hand, trying to acquire the art of putting type into it. He was putting the letters upside down, the lower ends of the type out, making spaces with em quad, in fact doing all sorts of odd things which only a beginner at printing can. Allen Gray was writing his salutatory, a task not so easy as some may imagine. The manner in which a new editor introduces himself to the public is very important. If he pleases public fancy, success is assured; but if he fails to do this, he might have to struggle for weeks to overcome the bad impression his introduction to the public made.

The opening address is always read with a great deal of care. In the editor makes his pledges to his readers, and the average reader seems more anxious to know what those pledges are than to see that they are kept.

"Well, you've got started," said Mr. Simmons, entering the office just as the new editor had his dedicatory task fairly under way. "I just dropped in here because I know you were alone, and thought it would be well to give you a little advice. I know more about this place than you do, by a blotted sight. That's all flummery-diddle what Strong said yesterday against this being a political paper. The Republicans have a majority in this county, and Strong knows it, but he's a Democrat and can well afford to say the paper shouldn't be political. Pitch right into politics, say I. An' now while I'm on this point, Mr. Gray, I've got a secret to tell ye—though ye must keep it to me!"

"I've had better bring it out in book form."

"I thought I would first run it in the *Western Republic*."

"But our paper is not copyrighted, and some unscrupulous publisher might steal this from you."

His reasoning was so clear that the poet became alarmed, and quickly rolling his manuscript as if he feared the precious treasure might be taken from him, hurried home to lock it up. Scouting at his success full ruse, Allen flushed his salutatory and, gathering up whatever he could about the little village and surrounding country, handed in sufficient original copy to fill the local columns.

There were some advertisements to go in the paper, several clippings, and the form was made up. Miss Hopkins sent her regrets that, owing to a spell of neuralgia, she would not be able to prepare anything for the next issue, but she would be ready to do so the week after. Allen, the carrier, was on his way to the post office to mail the paper.

"There's only a few months since they came back the last time. They won't be back again to do with us, an' we uns don't have nothing to do with 'em."

"Where did they come from?"

"No 'un knows. The house had been vacant, except two old people stayed there and kinder took care of it. The man was cross an' wouldn't talk nothing but French, 'n' the old woman was deaf and dumb. The boys used to try to git in the orchard, but the old feller came out with a gun an' scared 'em in furren language at 'em, an' shooed 'em off. They won't go nigh it. Then he's been some awful sights seen than 'o' nights," concluded Toby, shuddering.

"What were they?"

"Well, Tommy Miles said he hoped he might drop dead, if 'twasn't so. He was comin' here through the woods one night, an' thought he'd risk comin' by the rock house. When he got nigh it, he heard a awful screechin' like some one was bein' killed, an' every window in the house was a bright blaze of light. He said he'd swear he saw a woman standin' at a window with wings, tryin' to fly when some one pulled her back. Then old Dobbs went by there one night an' saw the blinds an' curtains all ablaze like, an' people flyin' around the ceiling."

"I just thought I would call in, Mr. Gray," she said, smiling carefully, lest she should lose her false teeth, "and bring you some poetry. I saw you had one of the editions of Mr. Barnes' in your last issue, and I concluded that if you was in such a strait for poetry I would be you somethin' else."

The editor felt bad. He assured her he really had no occasion for poetry, but sometimes inserted a few lines if the verse was short.

"My lines are very short and so quaint."

"What is the subject?"

"It is an ode to a bat found dead in a garret."

Allen thought of all subjects on earth, but would be least inclined to invent one with poetic thought.

"Shall I read it?" she asked. She was a lady, and he could not refuse to listen, so she did.

"You feather, leathery, ungrateful bat,

Sail round the room and fly in my hat,

Or haste to cease at the door.

You amuse the boys, you frighten the oak,

But not you are deaf, poor bat,

Lyin' on the floor,

Nose catchin' your stink,

Now shade a can,

Unfortunate bat,

Over your bier.

**N*o tears bear this sad tale,

Be by its wing unshamed.

I'll harr' it, O'er a bat,

Hung on the wall,

To folds to look at,

An' then—*

This poetic cushion had the merit of brievity, and the editor thought he might have room for it in the *Western Republic*.

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Allen learned the folly of telling men they had forgotten. One does not wish to seem unimportant as to be forgotten, and to forget one is at best a lame excuse. Allen assured the merchant it should never occur again, gave him two copies and promised him a personal mention in the next issue. The new editor was in the midst of an article when Mr. Cross, the produce and grocery man, came in with a paper in his hand and fury in his eyes.

"See here," he roared, in a voice as angry as hell, "you've made a thunderin' blunder in our ad."

"What is it?"

"Don't you see you've spelt eggs with two p's?" said the bald-headed merchant.

"Well, isn't that correct?"

"No, it's not. If you don't know how to spell you'd better quit tryin' to run a newspaper."

I looked at a label which came on one of my boxes from St. Louis, and eggs was spelt with one 'g.'

"The label was wrong; here is the way Webster spells it." And Allen turned to his dictionary. The grocer stood scratching his head and swore that either Webster or the man who made out the label was wrong.

"That ain't all neither, the ad's wrong."

"In what respect? Let me see the advertisement," said Allen, almost out of patience.

We took the paper and read: "The highest price paid for eggs, bacon and poultry at the drug or grocery store."

"I guess it's all right, Mr. Strong," said the editor.

"I am thankful for any advice you may choose to give, Mr. Strong," returned the new editor.

"I guess you noticed how I saved on Tom Simmons yesterday. He's a politician, and a Republican. Of course he wanted this to be a Republican paper, but so's see Turley's Point is in a Democratic county, and it wouldn't do. We've got a big majority in this county. The *Western Republic* is to be run for the interest of Turley's Point, not for the interest of Turley's Point."

The new editor was inclined to agree with Strong, who, having considerable property in the town, would be materially benefited by the upholding of Turley's Point.

"It is too early to shape the future policy of this paper, Mr. Strong," said the editor.

"My idea from the first was to publish an independent newspaper."

"That's the idea exactly. Well, I guess I won't stay here any longer, any longer."

"By the way, Mr. Strong," said Allen, "who lives in that old stone house on the hill?"

"Mr. Strong, I think, is turning on the young editor the look of astonishment and terror, answered:

"Mr. Gray, you'd better not inquire

too much about that. Don't mention the old house, don't go near it. We want the thing to die out if it kin. It's a curse to Turley's Point, and least said the better."

Without attempting any further explanation, he too, went out, leaving the new editor more interested than ever. He sat a few moments wondering what that remarkable mystery could be, and then, thinking himself that his salutatory was not finished, set his pencil and resumed his work.

Again the door of his dingy office was darkened. It was Toney Barnes who entered with a roll of MS, under his arm and the smile of a successful poet on his face.

"I've got a few little pieces here that I want to read you," he said, dropping down upon a seat by the editor's side.

"Leave them to be read at my leisure," said the editor.

"No, no; you can't understand it half so well as if I read it myself. Now just listen here."

He unrolled some manuscript, of which he was evidently very proud, and

your communications earlier in the week."

"Crowded out, an' that snake such a whopper!" cried the irate old man.

"If you're going to low important items like that to slip an' fill up your paper with cookin' receipts, an' furrow news about Congress, yo'll play out party soon, I'm thinkin', and the old gentackin', in no very amiable mood, turned about and left the office.

It is not a very great exaggeration to say

that by evening on the day after the first issue of the *Western Republic* the editor felt very much inclined to commit suicide.

After a few days he learned not to worry at the follies of some people, and, besides, those who annoyed him most were greatly in the minority. By entering to the vanity of the few who are ambitious to have their names in print, he preserved their favor, and did not injure his circulation. Those who were offered at being forgotten became good natured being remembered.

The more sensible offered words of encouragement to the new editor and hoped he would succeed. The second issue had a short essay from Miss Hopkins, and a shorter poem from Toney Barnes.

Allen was hard at work on the third issue when Tom Simmons again dropped in on him with a serious look on his face.</p