

INNOCENCE.

In bonny Scotland, 'cross the sea Upon a summer day...

A STROKE OF LIGHTNING.

"Welcome, stranger. Can you take pot luck with us? Hi, Jim, bring another plate for the gentleman...

Such was the greeting received one autumnal evening back in the Seventies by a lone horseman...

Fine looking fellow he was, too, about thirty-five years old, with a well knit figure, piercing black eyes...

Said he: "See my mare over there? Isn't she a beauty? She came from New Mexico. I was down there at a round up several years ago..."

As he finished speaking he gave a low, peculiar whistle and the mare whinnied in return, a perfect picture as she stood with mane and tail flying in the breezes...

Soon all the men were wrapped in their blankets, feet to the fire, and fast asleep—all but one. That one was Elliott. The glowing embers, now and again emitting a crackle and spark...

"What great luck I did have in that jack pot, standing all the raises on a pair of jacks, but when I drew in two more in my three card draw against those pat hands, I felt easier. Guess I cleared five thousand on the afternoon game. Lucky for me I cashed in and went to supper. I was only in a few hundred when that row came up..."

He felt of his belt. Yes, the money was safe, strapped around his waist under his shirt.

"I wonder if that fellow's dead yet. The contemptible cheat. Thought he could deal second card on us, did he? Well, it didn't work. Wonder who fired that shot. When the light went out I felt pretty squeamish. He spoke my name; I heard it plainly just as I went out the door, but I didn't stop; I didn't have time; too warm around those diggings just then. Wonder if those bullets went through the roof. It helped to increase the confusion, and I didn't want any sheriff's party in that room, not any. Awkward, my dropping that pistol. Wish I had it back again, for I've carried it so many years. Wonder if I'll find Mollie over at that railroad town. She was to have reached there yesterday, and I'm late, but I guess she'll wait. How sleepy I am! Dear old Moll!"

And he slept the sleep that only outdoor exercise can give. Early dawn found the party breakfasted, and Elliott, bidding his hosts goodby, started once more on the trail to that lonely mountain village where the railroad should bring his loved one to him.

Busy with their plans and the repair of their surveying instruments for the day's use, the engineering party did not notice the approach of a band of men whose sudden appearance startled them an hour later.

and been so hospitably entertained, Elliott felt the exhilaration of the fresh mountain air and quickened his horse's pace to a gallop. The mare caught the bit in her teeth and away they went, faster and faster. Thus it was that the party riding over the same track, handicapped by having to watch for the imprint of the horse's hoofs as they went along, did not catch sight of Elliott until about midday.

When near enough to recognize him the party quickened their pace, and laughed grimly when they saw him wave his hand at them. For his part he was wondering what had brought them to this out of the way place, but glad of the company on his way should it also prove theirs.

"What in hell has got into you fellows?" asked Elliott. "Shut up," answered the leader. "Elliott, we're dead onto you, and we don't want any talk from you at all. Hank Green lived long enough night before last to tell who killed him, and you've got to swing for it. Come on, boys."

Elliott's protestations of his innocence were not even listened to. His weapons were taken from him, his hands tied behind him, and quicker than it takes to tell one of the party had shinned up a tree which stood handily near and fastened a lasso to a limb. The empty pork barrel was rolled out under it, turned up on end, and Elliott was stood on it, while one of the men with no gentle hand knotted the rope about his neck, leaning over his saddle to complete the operation.

His captors gathered about him and he was commanded to speak out if he had anything to say. Only a slight push would have sent the barrel from beneath his feet. He could feel the cold sweat upon his brow, hear the beating of his heart. It sounded clear and distinct in his ears as he began his farewell speech to his merciless judges.

"Boys," said he, "you are dead wrong. I did not kill Hank Green. That revolver you have there was mine, and I did fire those empty chambers, but at no man. I fired them in the air to make the confusion greater after the row to give us all a chance to escape before the sheriff or any other outsiders would dare to come in upon us. I swear that I did not kill that man and I do not know who killed him."

A burst of hoarse laughter was his only response. "As God is my judge, men, I am innocent. Do you think I would lie about it, standing here on the brink of eternity? If justice will not free me, will money? I have plenty of it here with me now. What do you say?"

"Push the barrel, Bill," cried one of his persecutors. "Line him out. We'll take the money home to Hank Green's woman; that's what we'll do."

The old man who acted as leader had been quietly watching the condemned man's face. A conviction that somehow or other Hank was mistaken forced itself upon him.

"Fardners," said he, "there may be something in this man's proposition after all. We followed him here to hang him, but d—n me if I don't believe we have tread the wrong road. I never heard of this man's doing anything that wasn't square. Did any of you?"

"Hang him anyway," spoke up one of the men.

"No, that's not right, boys. Where is that money, Elliott?"

Taking off the belt as directed, he led the way to one side to try and save his life. It was no use to talk to the party however. The best he could do was done. Elliott saw the men mount their horses, and hope rose within his breast as he saw them untie his mare, and bringing her with them ride slowly to his side.

"Elliott," said the leader, "there are seven of us. Four think you ought to die, three do not. We have decided to take your valuables and your horse back to Hank's widow and leave you here, just as you are, alive. There ain't much prospect of your getting away, but we won't murder you and we won't set you free. You swore to God you were innocent. Let your God see to it you are freed or have mercy on your soul. Come on, boys, our job is finished."

With that he rode away, the others following him, and none of them looked back as they returned over the way they had come. Off in the distance the men noticed the mare throw up her head and listen a moment and then whinny. One of them sententially remarked, "She must have heard that whistle, boys, but she'll never hear it again on earth."

"I've got my boots on to die in, anyway," said the man on the barrel, and he smiled grimly as he thought of the bravado of his boyish remark years before, that he "didn't want any lingering sickness and death in his." There wasn't a cowardly bone in his body. He really felt relieved when the men had gone, for he at least had his thoughts to himself as long as he lived. There was no one to jeer, no curious spectators around to worry him and he calmly awaited the end. He could feel the barrel oscillate beneath his feet, knew that there was but a few inches slack in the rope, and that a false movement and a slight change in equilibrium meant strangulation and death.

His card playing proclivities stood him in good stead. He was a good enough poker player to know that the game consisted pure and simple of relative calculation of percentages and opportunities. He who takes his money upon the turn or chances of cards soon

learns one lesson—to patiently bide his time.

The last words of the leader of the party kept constantly recurring to him. It was with no religious sentiment that he thought of possible deliverance, but with the conviction that he deserved better than a death like this.

Seemingly in sympathy with his situation and his mood, the twilight hours now fast approaching brought warning of a storm. He noticed this with pleasure, for both hunger and thirst had assailed themselves. He awaited the soft, cooling rain which he saw approaching over the mountains with a feeling of relief. The leaves had fallen off the tree, winter was so near at hand, and he turned his face to the sky to catch the fast falling drops upon his face and tongue. The moisture refreshed him, and he felt his courage revive and hope once more spring up within his breast. The long roll of distant thunder and the vivid bursts of lightning did not even awe him. It seemed like a great battle, and he pictured himself in the thick of the fight. If he only had that chance! How welcome it would be, and how happily he could await the bullet that would send him into the great unknown, and the news be flashed home by the wires, "Victor Elliott died a hero's death at his post on the field of battle."

The center of the storm approached nearer. The gusts of wind blew more frequently and the rain poured down upon him until he was wet to the skin. Without warning, there came a short, quick flash—he saw a blaze of light about him and all was changed. He seemed falling, falling into endless space, and then, mounting upward, he rode on the wings of light. Impatiently he seemed blinking his eyes, so that he might see more plainly this wondrous, beautiful scene. Sparks of fire seemed to obliterate his sight and burn into his brain. He tried to speak, to cry aloud. His heart seemed bursting with an ecstatic joy, but he could not make a sound. That all was a blank.

After a long, long time he seemed to feel the chill that comes over one when the bed clothing is not warm enough in the night. He thought that was what ailed him, and started to reach down his hand and put it up over him. The movement brought consciousness. "How was this? Where was he? His mind recalled the events of the day and the evening storm. How could this be? Here he was sitting upright on the wet ground, his hands tied behind him, aching in every limb. Assuredly still in the land of the living. He looked up over his head.

It was not a delusion; it was reality. The rope was still about his neck, and there by his side on the ground, with the other end tied to it, was the limb of a tree. The blaze of light that had seemed so near him a few minutes before was in reality a flash of lightning occurring hours ago, for it was now broad daylight. It had struck that identical tree and freed him. There it stood splintered and broken.

He heard a familiar sound near at hand. Could he believe his eyes? There was his mare contentedly grazing near by. He whistled to her and she came trotting to him, dragging at the end of a lariat tied to her picket to which her captors had tied her the night before. It was too much for his feelings, and he broke down and cried like a child when he felt her soft nose on his face expecting the caress he usually gave her. Heaven had not only vindicated his innocence, but had returned his useful pet to him in his great need of her.

Bummed and sore, it took him nearly an hour to free himself from the cruel ropes, but at last succeeding, he found his oil skin bag over near the adobe house and ate heartily. The spring quenched his thirst, and he felt like a man born anew.

It was with a heart full of happiness and gratitude to Almighty God for his miraculous escape that he mounted the horse and continued the journey which had proved so full of incident to him.

"It'll be a better husband to Mollie than before, bless her heart, for coming out here to be with me, expecting to give up the comforts of city life," said he, as he rode along the way that was rapidly bringing him to her. "Those drafts that I sent to the bank in Denver last week will come in handy now. We will go over the range to Frisco, and start life over again. Some day I'll come back here and find out who did kill Hank Green. His wife has that dust. She is welcome to the use of it. Maybe it's just as well to get away from that life after all," and he rode on content.

A wagon train set over to the railroad town from Bluffville the next week brought back the news of Elliott's escape, of his meeting with his wife and their departure to a place unknown. The rough mining camp had too much else to attend to to think long over the strange events of the week gone by. Some years afterward it was recalled to them in an unexpected manner. Victor Elliott had come back. His means and position acquired in his new home protected him from rough treatment, especially so when the townspeople learned that he was going over incident after incident, questioning man after man about the shooting of Hank Green, and that he had made the widow a present of the money taken from him by force. His search was in vain. Nothing could be found out about who fired the shot. At his own request he was tried by a jury, all the evidence weighed, and he was acquitted of the charge of murder. There is a curious memento hanging in the owner's library. It is a part of a branch of a tree, holding a saddle, bridle and lariat. Its history is seldom told—you know it and so do I.—Warren Chase in St. Paul Pioneer Press.

They Eat Baked Moss. Along the Columbia river a kind of bread is made from a moss that grows on the spruce fir tree. This moss is prepared by placing it in heaps, sprinkling it with water and permitting it to ferment. Then it is rolled into balls as big as a man's head, and these are baked in pits.—Washington Star.

CANONIZED. Amid the busy multitude moves she, A queen uncrowned, a saint in earthly guise, With—in the clear depths of her shining eyes And on her pallid face—a radiance That seems reflected from the crystal sea Which stretches twist our souls and Paradise. Some say that in her heart a sorrow lies Which contradicts her sweet tranquillity. A victor, no symbolic palm she bears; Upon her face her triumph's sign she wears—A peace that showeth all her stainless soul. Enthroned in hearts of erring and of good, She reigns in royalty of womanhood. Yet round her head there shines no aureole!—Josephine Preston Peabody in Kate Field's Washington.

Couldn't Pass the Note. Mr. Casilear told how he happened to be in New York at one time during the war looking out for a gang of counterfeiters. To avoid making his presence in the city conspicuous he put up at a second rate hotel, where he was unknown. For some purpose he handed to the clerk at the desk a brand new fifty cent note. It was an issue just out, with General Spinner's portrait on it, the likeness having been substituted for a picture of Justice with her scales, which the forgers had imitated very successfully. The clerk looked at the note with evident suspicion, and handed it back. "I never saw anything like that before," he said. "It is good, I assure you," replied Mr. Casilear. "I don't believe it," said the clerk. "Very well," rejoined Mr. Casilear. "It doesn't matter, though I know it is good, because I made it myself." The clerk smiled sardonically. "That is just what occurred to me," he said; "therefore I refused to accept it." Mr. Casilear felt that the joke was on himself, so he treated himself to a bottle of soda water at the bar and left for Washington that evening.—New York Sun.

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