

THE CLOSING YEAR.

'Tis midnight's holy hour, and silence now is brooding, like a gentle spirit, o'er the still and pulseless world. Hark! on the winds...

For memory and for tears. Within the deep, still chambers of the heart, a specter dim, whose tones are like the wizard voice of time...

The year has gone, and with it many a glorious thought. Of happy dreams, its mark is on each brow, its shadows in each heart. In its swift course it waded its scepter o'er the beautiful...

It passed o'er the battle-plain, where sword and spear and shield flashed in the light of mid-day—and the strength of serried hosts is shivered, and the grass, green from the soil of carnage, waves above the crushed and moldering skeleton...

Remorseless Time! Fierce spirit of the glass and scythe! what power can stay him in his silent course, or melt his iron heart to pity? On, still on, he presses, and forever. The proud bird, the condor of the Andes, that can soar through heavens unfathomable depths, or brave the fury of the northern hurricane...

Revolutions sweep o'er earth, like troubled visions o'er the breast. Of dreaming sorrow; cities rise and sink, like bubbles on the water; fiery signs, Sprinkling blazing from the ocean, and go back to their mysterious caverns; mountains To heaven their bald and blackened cliffs, and bow Their tall heads to the plain; new empires rise...

NEW YEAR AND OLD YEAR. New Year, if you were bringing Youth, As you are bringing Age, I would not have it but, in sooth; I have no strength to wage Lost battles over. Let them be, Bury your dead, O Memory!

A Night Of Horror.

Written for the Daily Statesman: There fell to me a night in my travels once, when necessity compelled me to accept as a stopping place, one of those modern abominations known as a railroad hotel...

sitting upright in bed. All seemed quiet for a moment, and thinking it was some fool's fancy, I dropped asleep again. No sooner was I in dreamland than a new horror was upon me. I was lying in a state of perfect helplessness on a railway track. An express train in full speed was coming down the grade. It was a mile away, but I could distinctly hear the dull rumble of the wheels as my ear lay close to the track...

Readjusting the disordered bed furniture and myself with it as best I could in the darkness, I was soon dozing again. Immediately I was confronted by a new horror. A fiend with a fiddle was before me, and again I was powerless. I have run away from many such fiends in my time, but this one seemed to realize that I was in his power, and danced about me with fiendish delight, never letting his bow rest for a moment, wringing from that poor fiddle such an eternal caterwauling, such a long and mingled string of sobs and wails and howls and groans, as would have unstrung the nerves of a granite sphinx.

It seemed an age that this torment was endured, and so intolerable did it become, that I longed for some bull of Bashan to toss me on his playful horn, or some thundering train to roll over my tortured frame, its mollyfying wheels. At last a good angel came to my relief. It was the night watchman of the hotel, rapping on the door of a neighboring room to awake some fellow traveler for an early train. At the sound of those rattling knuckles, my fiendish tormentor vanished in the darkness, and his infernal discords died away like a wail of despair.

I had been reading Dante's Inferno on the train that day;—so in my next dream, I was falling from infinite heights into the black Tartarean abyss, where ten thousand fiends, with red-hot pitchforks held aloft waited to impale me. The air seemed to sing a sad requiem about my ears, as I fell down, down, with the speed of light, and the hissing of the through below filled me with ten thousand nameless pangs. One instant more, and those red-hot thirsty prongs would have received me. But in that one instant relief came to me. My ears were suddenly greeted by a long sharp sound that seemed somehow familiar to me and in less than a moment, that Tartarean throng were turned into smoke, and driven away as before the march of a tornado. The sound I had heard was the scream of a locomotive in the car yard below.

I now resolved to forego sleep, deeming the risk too great, and being fully awake, I listened to the sounds that had been causing my trouble. They evidently proceeded from the next room, and for two mortal hours, I tried to make out what kind of an animal was there imprisoned. The sounds were indescribable. It was neither howling, nor growling, nor squealing, nor barking. A dog fight in the street, or a hundred swine calling for food, or a cat concert on a back sidewalk would have been musical beside the monotonous measures that came to me through the thin partition that separated that room from mine.

I thought to escape at last by burying my ears in the pillows, and pulling the quilts over my head. That failing, I put my fingers in my ears. But down under quilts and pillows, and finger ends, those harrowing sounds dug their way to my auditory nerve, and would not give me rest. Only when daylight came did I get relief. Then activity began in the car yard below. The clang of bells, the screams of whistles, the jamming together of freight cars, and the receding rumble of the long trains as they pulled out beneath my window, had a soothing effect upon my nerves. Soon I fell asleep as quietly as an infant in its mothers arms, and I dreamed for an hour, amid the clang and clatter of moving cars and engine bells, that I was pilloved on a bed of down and being regaled by the songs of fairyland.

But I watched the door of that room the next morning to learn, if possible, what kind of animal was being submitted to cruel torture there. The door opened at last, and it came out. It had two legs, an immense stomach, and a large red nose.

The long and short of the matter is that I spent that night of horrors within, perhaps five feet of the champion snorer of the world.

SALEM, OREGON, 1886. [Although the above sketch was written several years ago, while Mr. Knight was traveling, this is the first time it was ever given to the eyes of the reading public.]

STAIGER BROTHERS. Dealers in Boots and Shoes—The Successors to C. Uzafove.

Among the oldest shoemakers in Salem is J. F. Staiger. He has had an experience of twenty years at the bench, and has resided in Salem for twenty-two years. His brother, Wm. Staiger, has been in Salem for twenty years, and both have an excellent reputation as business men. On January 23, 1886, they purchased the stock and good will of Charles Uzafove's boot and shoe business, and continued the business under the firm name of Staiger Bros. Their long acquaintance with the boot and shoe business stood them in good play on taking this business, in the way of selecting new stock, and in getting good goods. Since taking the business, they have more than doubled their stock of goods. They now carry a full line of men's fine shoes, from the factory of Bart & Packard, at Brockton, Mass., beside a full line of men's and boys' medium grades. In ladies' shoes, their best grades bear the trade mark of Edwin C. Berk, New York, and they make a specialty in men's medium grades, of shoes manufactured by Bangley & Smith, of Boston, Mass. Also a fine line of men's calf and kip boots. Staiger Bros. are also dealers in leather and findings, and all other goods usually found in a first class boot and shoe store. They are always willing to allow inspection of their goods, at 205 Commercial street.

Armstrong.

[The following short, yet curious tale, by Rev. P. S. Knight, first appeared in the Overland Monthly for June 1875, and was afterward copied in several of the principal news journals of California and Oregon. Considering it "too good" to lay away, and become forgotten, the STATESMAN takes pleasure in giving it to its readers again.]

In the early days of California—the golden days of gold, or the golden days of old, as you please—in a certain miner's camp on the Yuba river, there lived a queer genius named Armstrong. He was an honest miner not differing materially from his fellows, excepting he had a curious habit of talking to himself. For the simple reason that he departed from common custom in this one particular, he was of course voted crazy by the other miners. To call all persons "crazy" who do not follow the customs of the majority, is a constant habit with men. But, day after day, Armstrong worked away with his pick and shovel, caring nothing for the remarks of his neighbors, and seeming to wish for no other partner in his toils or his rest, save the invisible personage whom he always addressed in the second person singular, with whom he was almost constantly and in close conversation. The common drift of his talk while at work, would be about as follows:

"Rather tough work, Armstrong—rich dirt, though—grab a dollar a pound—no time to waste—pitch in, sir—hanged if I don't wish I was in the states. This mining's a mighty hard work. Nonsense, Armstrong; what you are to be talking in that way, with three ounces a day right under your feet, and nothing to do but just to dig it out."

His conversation would be duly punctuated with strokes of the pick and lifts of the loaded shovel. And so the days would pass along, and Armstrong worked, and slept, and talked with his invisible partner. Well, it happened, in due course of time, that the class of human vampires, commonly called gamblers, made their appearance at the camp where Armstrong worked. As he was not above following the example of his fellows, he paid the new-comers a visit. It is the same old story. After watching the game a while, he concluded it was the simplest thing in the world. So he tried his luck and won—a hundred dollars! Now, any new experience would always set Armstrong to thinking and talking to himself worse than ever. It was so this time. "Now, Armstrong," he said, as he hesitated about going to work next morning, "that is the easiest hundred dollars you ever made in your life. What's the use of going into a hole in the ground to dig for three ounces a day? The fact is, Armstrong, you are sharp. You were not made for this kind of work. Suppose you just throw away your pick and shovel, leave the mines, buy a suit of store clothes and dress up like a born gentleman and go at some business that suits your talent."

Armstrong was not long in putting these thoughts and sayings into action. He left the diggings and invested in fine clothes. He looked like another man, but he was still the same Armstrong nevertheless. He was not long in finding an opportunity to try a new profession. Walking forth in his fresh outfit, he had just concluded a long talk with himself about his bright prospects, when he halted in front of a large tent with a sign on it "Miner's Rest." Armstrong went in. It did not seem to him that he remained very long, but it was long enough to work a wonderful revolution in his feelings. When he came out, he was a changed man—that is to say, he was a "changeless" man. He was thunderstruck, amazed, bewildered. He had lost his money, lost his new prospect, lost his self-conceit—lost everything but his new clothes and his old habit of talking to himself. It is useless to say that he was mad. Armstrong was very mad. But there was no one to be mad at but Armstrong himself, so self number two was in for a rough lecture: "Now, Armstrong, you are a nice specimen—you fool—you talk—you dead-beat—you inf— Well, I need not repeat all the hard things he said. Like King Richard, "he found within himself no pity for himself."

But mere words were not sufficient. It was a time for action. But Armstrong never once thought of shooting, drawing hanging, or any other form of suicide. He was altogether too original as well as to sensible for that. Yet he was resolved upon something real and practical in the way of reformatory punishment. He felt the need of a self imposed decree of bankruptcy, that should render the present failure as complete as possible and prevent a similar course of foolishness in the future.

So the broken firm of "Armstrong & Self" went forth in meditation long and deep. Some of his thoughts were almost too deep for utterance. But finally he stood by the dusty road along which the great freighting wagons were hauling supplies to the mining camps up the Sacramento. One of these wagons, drawn by six yoke of oxen, was just passing. Snap, snap, snap, in slow, irregular succession, came the keen stinging reports of the long Missouri ox-whip. "G'lang! g'lang! wo-haw!" shouted the tall, dust-begrimed driver, as he swung his whip and cast a sidelong glance at the broken firm, wondering "What in thunder all them store-clothes was a-doin' thar." Now, when Armstrong saw the long column of white dust rising behind that wagon, he was taken with an idea. So he shouted to the driver, to know if he might be allowed to walk in the road behind the wagon.

"Get in and ride," said the driver. "No," said Armstrong; "I wish to walk."

"Then walk, you crazy fool," was the accommodating response, as the driver swung his whip.

Then came the tug of war. Greek never met Greek more fiercely than did the two contending spirits composing the firm of Armstrong & Self, at that particular moment. "Now, Armstrong," said the imperious head of the firm, "you get right into the middle of that road, sir, and walk in that dust, behind that wagon all the way to the Packer's Roost, on the Yuba river." "What, with these clothes on?" "Yes, with those clothes on." "Why, it is fifteen miles, and dusty all the way." "No matter, sir; take the road. You squander your money at three card monte; I'll teach you a lesson."

under the heat of a September sun. And there, in the road, behind Armstrong, behind the wagon—slowly, wearily, thoughtfully, but not silently. He was a man who always spoke his thoughts.

"This serves you right, Armstrong. Any man who will fool his money away at three-card monte deserves to walk in the dust." "It will spoil these clothes." "Well, don't you deserve it?" "The dust fills my eyes." "Yes, any man who gambles all his 'just' away at three-card monte deserves to have dust in his eyes—and alkali dust, at that." "The dust chokes me." "All right, any man who will buck at monte deserves to be choked. Keep the road, sir—the middle of the road—close up to the wagon. Do you think you will ever buck at monte again, Armstrong?"

And so the poor culprit, self-arrested, self-condemned, coughed, and sneezed, and choked, and walked, and talked, mile after mile, hour after hour; while the great wagon groaned and creaked, the driver bawled and swung his whip, the patient oxen gave their shoulders to the yoke, and the golden sun of September sunk wearily towards the west. The shadows of evening were beginning to fall when the wagon halted at the place called Packer's Roost, on the Yuba.

"Here we rest," sighed Armstrong, just above his breath as he looked at the stream. "No, you don't," answered the head of the firm, "You bucked your money away at monte, and talk about resting! Now Armstrong, go right down the bank, sir, into that river." As the command was peremptory, and a spirit of obedience was thought the safest, Armstrong obeyed without parley; and down he went, over head and ears, store-clothes and all, into the cold mountain stream. It was a long time that he remained in the water, and under the water. He would come to the surface every little while to talk, you understand. It was impossible for Armstrong to forbear talking. "Oh, yes," he would say as he came up and snuffed the water from his nose, "you'll buck your money away at three-card monte, will you? How do you like the water care?" His words were, of course, duly punctuated by irregular plunges and catchings of the breath. It so happened that the man who kept the shanty hotel of the Packer's Roost had a woman for a wife. She, being a kindhearted creature, besought her lord to go down and "help the poor crazy man out of the water."

"Haw!" said the ox-driver, "he ain't a crazy man; he's a fool. He walked behind my wagon and talked to himself all the way from Scabbletown. Thereupon arose a lengthy discussion about the difference between a crazy man and a fool. But, after a while, the landlord and the ox-driver went down to the bank and agreed to go Armstrong's security against bucking at monte in the future, so he came out and went up to the house. "Will you have a cup of tea or coffee?" said the woman, kindly. "Yes, madame," said Armstrong, "I will take both."

"He is crazy, sure as can be," said the woman, but she brought the two cups as ordered. "Milk and sugar?" she enquired, kindly, as before. "No, madame; mustard and red pepper," answered Armstrong. "I do believe he is a fool," said the woman as she went for the pepper and mustard.

Armstrong, with deliberate coolness, put a spoonful of red pepper into the tea and a spoonful of mustard into the coffee. Then he poured the two together into a large tin cup. Then the old conflict raged again, and high above the din of rattling tin cups and pewter spoons, sounded the stern command, "Armstrong, drink it, sir—drink it down." A momentary hesitation, a few desperate gulps, and it was down. "Oh, yes," said our hero, as his throat burned, and the tears ran from his eyes, "you buck your money away at three-card monte, do you?"

Now, the Thomsonian dose above described very nearly ended the battle with poor Armstrong. He was silent for quite a time, and every body else was silent. After a while, the landlord ventured to suggest that a bed could be provided if it was desired. "No," said Armstrong, "I'll sleep on the floor." "You see, stranger," said he, eyeing the landlord with a peculiar expression, "this fool has been squandering gold dust at monte—three-card monte—and does not deserve to sleep in a bed."

So Armstrong ended the day's battle by going to bed on the floor. Then came the dreams. He first dreamed that he was sleeping with his feet on the North Pole and his head in the tropics, while all the miners of Yuba were ground-slucing in his stomach. Next, he dreamed that he had swallowed Mt. Shasta for supper, and that the old mountain had suddenly become an active volcano and was vomiting acres and acres of hot lava.

Then the scenes were shifted, and he seemed to have found his final abode in a place of vile smells and fierce flames, politely called the antipodes of heaven. And while he writhed and groaned in sleepless agony, a fortailed fiend with his thumb at his nose was saying to him in a mocking voice: "You buck your money away at three-card monte, do you—hey? But even this troubled sleep had an end at last, and Armstrong awoke. When he looked at himself in the broken looking-glass that hung on the wall, he thought his face bore traces of wisdom that never had been there before. So he said: "I think you have learned a lesson, Armstrong. You can go back to your mining now, sir, and let monte alone." Time showed that he was right. His lesson was well learned. The miners looked a little curious when he re-appeared at the camp, and still called him crazy. But he had learned a lesson many of them never learned, poor fellows. They continued their old ways, making money fast and spending it foolishly—even giving it to monte dealers. But the Armstrong firm was never broken in that way but once. After that, whenever he saw one of those peculiar signs, "Robbers' Roost," "Fleecers' Den," or "Fools' Last Chance," Armstrong would shake his head with a knowing air, and say to himself as he passed along: "Oh, yes, Armstrong, you've been there; you know all about that; you don't buck your money away at three-card monte—not much!"

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