The Observer.

MORO, OREGON:

FRIDAY.....Oct. 12, 1906

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THE

Automatic Road Agent

By WILLIAM WALLACE COOK

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I CAN never forgive Klipton for the way he deceived me in the matter of that automatic road agent. Upon its completion I was led to believe the machine was nothing more harmful than a motor cowboy, and when the mask fell my faith in my versatile friend was shaken to its very foundations.

That Klipton in a most salutary way was hoist of his own petard did much to restore the status quo ante of our cordial relations. That I myself was involved disastrously in his rescue from a scheme of comprehensive lawlessness was of small moment, considering the beneficent results of the aforesaid rescue.

Great geniuses, I suppose, spin their glittering webs in the dark. At any rate, Klipton's ingenuity when at highest pressure withdrew into some lair where it could be alone with its originator.

In the present instance the lair was the rear room of our adobe dwelling in Matanzas, N. M. From that rear room came all day long and far into the night a mellow "clink" of hammer on anvil, and against its closely curtained windows struck sporadic gleams of a portable forge.

The while he worked on in mysterious secrecy I slaved at the printer's trade to keep him in funds for material. So great was my trust in his ability that I handed over my wages every Saturday night without question. Whenever Klipton showed himself he was grimy with smoke and dust, grimy, but complacent.

"William," he remarked as we sat over one of our frugal meals, "the machine I am building is going to prove a ten strike. Money? My dear boy, we shall take in the coin hand over fist. Today you are to give them two weeks' notice at the printing office."

"Are you ready to tell me what the thing is?" I inquired.

"Not yet. In two weeks, however, it will give me great pleasure to inform you fully."

During the next fortnight Klipton surprised me by allowing me to retain my wages. On the night I severed my connection with the Matanzas Mercury he took me by the hand and led me into the room where he had been laboring for the last three months.

Before me was a skeleton motor car, small, compact—little more than wheels and platform, with the necessary box to house the machinery. But the car itself was only an insignificant part of my friend's amazing machine.

Welded to it and forming one with the vehicle was a monstrosity in the form of a steel man; not a whole man, merely the head, trunk and arms, built on a gigantic model—the half of a magog.

This latter day centaur was a hideous conception. Its vacuous face and staring eyes sent uncanny shivers creeping through my nerves, and I turned away with a gasp.

In each hand the semifigure clasped a long barreled Colt's revolver. The steel arms were jointed, and Klipton was lifting them proudly and moving them this way and that when I turned my back.

"So that is what I have been putting my wages into for the last ten weeks!" I exclaimed, perhaps a trifle bitterly. I had cajoled myself into the belief that Klipton had been solving the problem of aerial navigation, and my disappointment was keen.

"Klipton's Motor Cowboy," my friend explained triumphantly, "primarily designed to benefit the cattle industry and incidentally Marcus Klipton and his friend, William Quinn.

"When charged with electricity, this machine will think, act and do everything but talk for a period varying from twenty-four hours to a week, depending upon the amount of energy used up by the car."

"But the revolvers?" I cried.

"All cowboys have revolvers," he answered, as I thought, evasively.

"It seems poorly designed to meet the requirements of a cattle range," I ventured, mustering up courage to continue my examination of the odd contraption.

"You don't understand these things, William," said Klipton calmly.

"If you'd explain how a patent cowboy is going to make money for us hand over fist, I think I could understand that."

"You'll have a practical demonstration of that tomorrow," he returned.

Next morning Klipton shook me into wakefulness and requested me to arise and dress with as much dispatch as possible. While getting into my clothes I stole a glance into the rear room.

The motor cowboy was gone, its departure having been accomplished by means of a seven foot breach in the adobe wall. I swept Klipton with a questioning glance.

"I pushed it down to the power plant," said he, "and filled it with electricity. It's now away on trial."

"I should like to see how it stands the test," I observed.

"So you shall, William. There are two horses at the door, and when we have had our breakfast we will ride out into the country and watch operations."

"Don't you have to go with it?" I queried.

"If any one had to go with it," he responded, "the machine would not be a success. My idea as to the work to be done is imparted through a series of push buttons. There my responsibility ceases, and the machine, of its own volition, does the rest."

We rode about five miles, not toward any ranch that I had ever heard of, but directly into the rocky hills. The mystery intensified and with it my apprehension.

There was a lawless strain in Klipton's makeup, and most of his ingenious undertakings trended in that direction.

"Klip," said I severely, "if there is anything crooked about this you can count me out."

"William," he retorted, "don't read me any of your homilies. We're not going to do anything crooked. We're simply going to watch and observe what happens."

He looked about him critically. The trail threaded a rugged ravine at that point, with shadowy lurking places gashed from the slopes on left and right.

"This is the place," he proceeded. "We will climb that hill, hitch our horses over the brow of it, and then take up our stations behind convenient bowlders."

"Why the bowlders?" I asked. "Haven't we a right"—

"I never saw such a fellow!" he interrupted crossly. "Consider yourself under my orders, William, or else point your cayuse for Matanzas and go back to the printing office. It looks to me as though your plebeian ideas were wedded to type sticking and twenty a week."

I accepted the rebuke meekly, and we hitched our horses on the other side of the hill and screened ourselves behind rocks commanding a view of the trail.

We had not been ten minutes in hiding when the stage from the gold camp at Pell's Notch trekked into sight on its way to the railroad at Matanzas.

"Watch," whispered Klipton, "and don't get excited."

The stage came merrily on, an express messenger on the seat with the

"IT WILL THINK, ACT AND DO EVERYTHING BUT TALK."

driver. At the messenger's feet was a strong box which I knew must contain a treasure in placer gold. Between the messenger's knees was a rifle.

As I kept my wondering eyes on the vehicle the four horses attached to it suddenly went back in their traces and then shot up in the air. The driver exploded a yell, and the messenger, quick as chain lightning, brought the rifle to his shoulder.

A report followed, and a musical ring followed the report—a ring that, through some weird acoustic effect, sounded for all the world like a titillating, ironical laugh.

Swerving my eyes the other way along the trail, I beheld the so called motor cowboy planted in the path, both weapons leveled at the two on the stage. A red card lettered in white had abruptly materialized at the front of the car, "Hands Up!"

I was spellbound—too much so for recrimination. All I could do was to crouch behind my bowlder and keep my fascinated eyes on the tail below.

The automaton pulled trigger, and the messenger's hat flew off. The messenger emptied his magazine over the horses' heads, and a chorus of those eerie laughs echoed up and down the ravine.

By then the stage horses were fairly under control, and the driver elevated his hands. The messenger, who had lost a lock of hair by a second bullet, followed suit.

The "Hands Up!" card vanished, and another took its place—"Deposit Valuables In Iron Basket In Front of Car!"

"Jumpin' wildcats!" bellowed the driver. "What sort of a holdup is this anyhow? That looks like the old boy himself. [illegible] you fellers with [illegible]."

A black card jumped viciously into sight—"Your money or your life! Hurry!"

This was immediately followed by the other card naming the place for the deposit of valuables and was emphasized with a third shot from one of the Colts, the bullet singing past the messenger's ear.

"Don't shoot!" cried the messanger frantically. "You're bullet proof, and I'm not, and that gives you the winning hand."

He clambered down from the stage, pulled the strong box after him, dragged it to the car and heaved it aboard. All the while Klipton's chef d'œuvre kept him covered with one of the revolvers.

Rushing back to the stage, the messenger regained the box. Then came a blue card bearing the word "Goodby," and the steel highwayman backed slowly from the trail into a narrow defile in the hillside.

The driver's long whip flickered out over the backs of the leaders, and the stage jumped on toward Matanzas like a cannon ball. There were no passengers inside the vehicle, and the last thing I saw was the white, scared face of the messenger looking back at the scene of the automaton's exploit.

"Marcus Klipton," said I, finding tongue, now that the excitement was over, "you have bewayed my trust in you. Motor cowboy, indeed!" I added sarcastically. "Why didn't you tell me it was a motor highwayman in the first place?"

"Don't get on your high horse, William," answered Klipton. "I wanted the truth to dawn on you by degrees. I have demonstrated, I think, that Klipton's automatic road agent is an unqualified success. We can build ourselves a nice little rendezvous out here in the hills and sit in the shade and play seven up and let our indestructible highwayman transform us into millionaires."

"Be that as it may," I went on relentlessly, "in taking the loot collected by this iniquitous machine you are receiving tainted money"—

"If it comes to that," he broke in, "there isn't a dollar in circulation in all this broad land that has not at some time or other been won dishonestly and passed through criminal hands."

"You will become a 'fence' for stolen property," I proceeded. "And then," I finished sternly, "suppose the automaton should kill somebody!"

"Hang it, William," cried Klipton, "you're about the worst case of discouragement an inventor ever went up against! I know when I've got a good thing, and I'm going to let my invention work and collect royalties for me. Take your own trail, and I'll take mine!"

With that he spun around and rushed down the hill in a temper. I could not bring myself to abandon him just yet and followed.

The automatic road agent moved out into the road to meet us as we advanced upon the place where it had been secreted. My friend proceeded very confidently, but came to a startled halt as one of the Colt's was lifted and brought to bear on him. Simultaneously the "Hands Up!" card flashed into view.

It was more than plain that Klipton was not expecting this. The revolver cracked, and Klipton's hat was twisted half around on his head.

"What's the matter, Klip?" I shouted.

"The blamed thing must have slipped a cog or something!" he flung back at me.

Then the other card flaunted its order for him to deposit his valuables in the basket.

"Run!" I yelled. "You know what happened to that fellow they called Frankenstein. Get behind the rocks or you'll be killed!"

"It's geared for fatalities if a victim tries to run," he groaned, palpitating back and forth in the trail. "Sneak around behind it, William," he added, clutching at a straw of hope, "and push button No. 3. Hustle! The black card is up!"

I hustled, but the other revolver focused itself upon me before I had taken a dozen steps. Klipton pulled disconsolately at his red locks and jumped around in the trail like an Indian doing a war dance.

"Now you're in it, too!" he whooped. "Go up close and put your contribution in the basket. We've got to do it! After that we'll follow the car till the electricity gives out, and then we can get the stuff back."

With the frowning muzzle of the six shooter looking me squarely in the face, I laid my forty dollar donation in the iron basket and followed it with an heirloom in the shape of an old silver watch. Thereupon I was permitted to back away.

Klipton advanced with one hand in his pocket. I don't think he had any valuables about him, and I watched with intense interest to see what happened.

Of a sudden, when close to the nefarious machine, my friend hurled himself upon it, one hand reaching around toward button No. 3. There followed a sharp report which struck on my heart like a knell.

With a groan Klipton dropped across the iron basket, a melancholy tribute to his own misguided genius. I leaped forward instinctively, but before I could come anywhere near the machine it had got under headway and was moving at a moderate gait in the direction of Pell's Notch.

I made haste to recover my horse and, trailing Klipton's mount behind me, started in pursuit. A clatter of hoofs drew my attention, and I discovered the sheriff and a posse of four galloping up from the rear.

They had started from Matanzas on the trail of a cattle thief and had encountered the stage two miles out. The harrowing tale of the driver and messenger had sent the officers after the singular bandit who had annexed the express company's strong box.

The sheriff, as I could see, looked upon me with more or less suspicion. I was known to be a close friend of Klipton's, and Klipton, so the sheriff had been informed, had pushed a machine answering the messenger's description to the Matanzas power house that morning.

Our pursuit did not lead us far on the Pell's Notch road. Just beyond the rocky hills the motor wheels left well defined tracks across the desert southward.

Spurring forward at top speed, we soon had the machine in sight—a slowly moving blot on the horizon. At about the same moment we discovered a trailing plume of smoke off to the west.

"The 12:20 local for Albuquerque," remarked the sheriff, and presently the train was seen writhing like a snake across the sand.

The blot representing the motor car was observed to be at a standstill, presumably experiencing difficulty in getting across the rails. A long drawn out whistle from the locomotive reached our ears, followed by shriek after shriek of frantic warning.

The automatic road agent failed to move, and we sat our horses and gazed while the train glided into the blot, passed on for a hundred yards or so, and then slowed to a halt.

"By Jupiter," cried the sheriff, "the local has collided with the horseless wagon! It's all up with the highwayman! Spurs and quirts, boys!"

I rode on with a sickening sensation of fear for my erring and luckless friend, but the fear faded into wonder when, on reaching the spot, we failed to find Klipton anywhere in the wreck.

The automatic road agent had been knocked into a scrap heap. By some miracle of poetic justice, however, the messenger's strong box was found a dozen feet from the track uninjured.

I raked my watch out of the debris, a shapeless thing flattened to the thinness of a knife blade. I likewise recovered fifteen of my forty dollars.

Yet, despite my personal loss, I should have been a happy man as I accompanied the sheriff and his posse back to Matanzas could I have known that Klipton was safe.

My doubts concerning his fate were set at rest a week later, when I received the following from Santa Fe:

"Dear William—Am in the hospital here with a bullet in my shoulder. Dropped off the car in the hills, saw you and the sheriff trail past and thought best not to return to Matanzas. Join me at this place as soon as possible. Have developed a second idea while lying in this neat little iron cot getting over the effects of the first. It's a corker! There's a fortune in it for you as well as for your repentant friend, KLIP."

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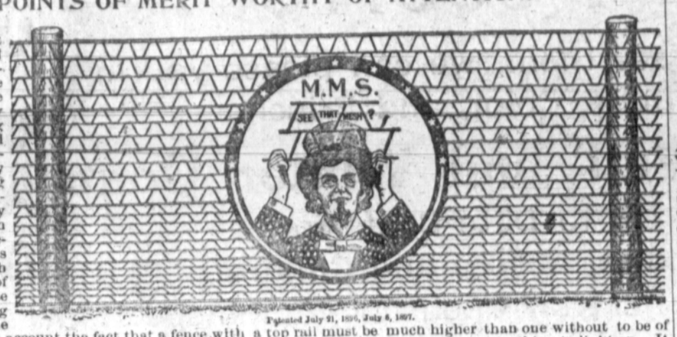

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For Astoria and way points, connecting with steamer for Ilwaco and North Beach. Steamer Hassalo, Ash street dock. Leaves 8.00 p. m. daily, except Sunday. Saturday 10.00 p. m. Arrives 5.00 p. m. daily except Sunday.

For Dayton, Oregon City and Yamhill River points, Ash street dock. Leaves 7.00 a. m daily except Sunday. Arrives 5.30 p.m. daily except Sunday.

For Lewiston, Idaho, and way points from Riparia, Wash. Leave Riparia 5.40 a. m., or upon arrival train No. 4, daily except Saturday. Arrive Riparia 4 p. m. daily except Friday.

For full information call on or address
Wm. McMURRAY,
Gen'l Passenger Agent,
Portland, Oregon.
W. R. CROGAN, AGENT,
Moro, Oregon.

COLUMBIA SOUTHERN RY.

Southbound passenger daily.	Distance fr Biggs	Time table No 11 May 20, 1906 STATIONS	Northbound passenger daily
1.20 pm	0	....Biggs....	11.50 arve
1.40	5.4	...Gibsons....	11.19
1.44	7 0	.....Sinks.....	11.10
2.04	9 8	.....Wasco.....	11.00
2.17	14.1	..Klondyke..	10.45
2.23	16 1	...Summit...	10.40
2.40	19.2	Hay Canon Jct	10.24
2.41	19.9	..McDonalds..	10.22
2.53	23.9	...DeMoss...	10.05
3.04	27.0	.....Moro.....	9.55
3.13	30.4	..Erskinville..	9.27
3.44	38 5	.Grass Valley.	9.20
4 00	45.8	...Bourbon...	8.55
4.16	52.5	.....Kent....	8.40
4.26	57.3	...Wilcox...	8.30
5.00 arv	70 0	...Shaniko...	8.00 a m

For rates and information apply to
W. R. Crogan, Agent
Moro, Or.

The Dalles, Portland and Astoria Navigation Co.

Regulator Line

Portland, The Dalles and way points

Steamers leave Portland and The Dalles daily except Sunday at 7 a. m. arriving at about 5 p m., connecting at Lyle with the

Columbia River & NorthernRyCo

For Goldendale and Klickitat valley points. Train leaves Goldendale at 5:30 a. m. daily except Sunday, arriving at Lyle at 7:30 a. m., connecting with down river boat for Portland and intermediate points.

Leaves Lyle for Goldendale on the arrival of the up river steamer.

Good Accommodations for Teams and Wagons.

For any further information write or call on the nearest Agent, or the General Office at Portland.

THE NORTH WESTERN LINE

CHICAGO AND THE **EAST**

When purchasing ticket to Chicago and the East, see that it reads via the Chicago & North-Western Railway. Choice of routes via Omaha or via St. Paul and Minneapolis.

It is the route of The Overland Limited and the direct line to Chicago from the Coast. Four fast daily Chicago trains make connections with all transcontinental trains at St. Paul and Minneapolis.

The Best of Everything.

All agents sell tickets via this line.

For further information apply to
R. V. HOLDER, General Agent, C. A. N.-W. Ry., 153 Third St., PORTLAND, ORE.

UNION PACIFIC THE OVERLAND ROUTE

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